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MASTER'S THESIS

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A COMPARATIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE
SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN THE
AESTHETIC THEORIES OF ALFRED STIEGLITZ,
EDWARD WESTON, ANSEL ADAMS, AND MINOR WHITE.

American University, M.A., 1970
Fine Arts

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AND DIFFERENCES IN THE AESTHETIC THEORIES
OF ALFRED STIEGLITZ, EDWARD WESTON,
ANSEL ADAMS, AND MINOR WHITE

by

Stuart A. Oring

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Minor White have been selected for this study because: (1) collectively they span a period in photographic history that is both definitive and significant; (2) each has achieved recognition as a true master of photography by The Museum of Modern Art, The George Eastman House, and by other outstanding photographers; and (3) each photographer has developed original concepts which have helped to shape the course that modern photography has taken.

Stieglitz was one of the first photographers to cast aside tradition in order to take advantage of the medium's own unique characteristics. He helped to establish photography as a fine art--a medium to be used independently of other art mediums for the purpose of visual communication. His "Equivalence Theory" indicates how basic communication concepts can be applied to a visual medium. That is: a feeling of the photographer can be transmitted by means of a subject matter symbol to an audience that has a shared

life-experience in common with the photographer.

Edward Weston and Ansel Adams defined the unique characteristics of photography that make it different from any other medium. They have indicated the relationship that exists between straight photography and previsualization in creative photography. The Zone System of Ansel Adams is a significant contribution to photography because it allows the photographer to utilize the characteristic of the medium in order to achieve the previsualized image. It ties photographic sensitometry to the service of the photographer's creative vision.

With Minor White, photography has reached a jumping-off place, or point of transition, between the past and what is yet to come. Other photographers such as Harry Callahan or Aaron Siskind have demonstrated a great and personal style, but they have not contributed the body of theoretical concepts that Minor White has, nor are they vastly different from Minor White in their stylistic approach to the medium.

Minor White developed Stieglitz' concept of Equivalence and provided photographic theory with new concepts as well. His development of the photographic sequence has led to its use as a new art form, and White made a significant contribution to our understanding of how the photograph

functions in visual communications to transmit the idea-feeling of the photographer to an audience.

In the course of this study, I shall describe the principal concepts of each photographer. The Summary and Conclusions will point out similarities and differences in these concepts.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

It was the purpose of this study to determine what similarities and differences exist in the aesthetic photographic theories of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Minor White.

Importance of the Study

The aesthetic photographic theories of Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Minor White have never been related. A study of the similarities and differences in these theories could help to define which of these concepts are valid guidelines for achieving effective photographs. The study could present an insight into the nature of the photographic medium, its essential characteristics, and its limitations.

METHODOLOGY

Review of the Literature

It was necessary to examine both published and unpublished materials pertaining to the subject of this study. A survey of the entire body of photographic literature was undertaken to determine precisely what magazine articles and books were applicable to the study. All of the material that was judged to be useful, for purposes of this study, was set aside and used in the research phase.

Two field trips proved necessary in order to complete the study. The Stieglitz Archive at Yale University houses the most extensive collection of Stieglitz material in the world. A comprehensive search of its materials yielded several unpublished manuscripts and letters which proved useful to the study. In addition, it was essential to visit Minor White at his Boston home in order to have access to the manuscripts: Conscious Photography and Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations. These manuscripts, which are presently undergoing publication, provide an insight into White's concepts about creative photography derived from a lifetime of photographic practice and teaching. Conscious Photography is a two-volume work that provides the reader with exercises and theoretical concepts; Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations is a

comprehensive anthology of Minor White's photographs.

Additional research material for this study was derived from class notes taken from Minor White lectures at the Rochester Institute of Technology and by direct correspondence with Ansel Adams. As a part of my research, I corresponded with: Mrs. Dorothy Norman, Paul Strand, Edward Steichen, Brett Weston, Minor White, Ansel Adams, Beaumont Newhall of the George Eastman House in Rochester, and Peter Bunnell of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In addition, I corresponded with Mrs. Georgia O'Keeffe, the widow of Alfred Stieglitz.

Research Methodology

In order to compare the aesthetic ideas of the four photographers, it was necessary to set down their ideas in an organized form. It was found that certain areas had been investigated by each of the four photographers. These areas of investigation could be broken down into the following broad divisions: (1) photography as an art form, (2) aesthetic concepts about photography, (3) craftsmanship, (4) straight photography, (5) the subconscious mind in photography, (6) the photographer's response to the subject, (7) the Equivalent, (8) audience responses to photographs, and (9) the photographic sequence as a creative form.

Some of the concepts were found to be unique to one

photographer, others were held in common by several of the photographers. Research note material was organized by photographer and by concept. A concept outline for each of the four photographers began to emerge. This outline became a basis for organizing the concepts but it also served to unify the study. This type of an approach made it possible to determine readily where the similarities and differences in a concept exist.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Straight Photography

Straight Photography is interpreted to mean: an approach to the medium of photography that abandons the traditions of the painter. It is based on the philosophy that the unique qualities and characteristics of a medium indicate how that medium should be used.

The Purist

"Purism" is interpreted to mean a straight approach to photography whereby procedures may be controlled but not by manual operations. "Purism" can be carried to such lengths that not even the "spotting" of dust specks on the print can be carried out without violating the medium.

The Equivalent

The photographic Equivalent is a photograph that acts

as a symbol or plays the role of a metaphor for a feeling state. The subject matter of an Equivalent transcends the literal and becomes important as a symbol of the photographer's "feeling state." For example, a cloud form may correspond to the photographer's feelings about a certain person. The photograph is not important as a literal rendering of a cloud.

Previsualization

Previsualization means to visualize the final print before the exposure is made. This previsualization of the print can be either as a realistic statement or as an intentional "departure from reality." The brightness values of the subject are determined by careful exposure-meter readings and the negative is exposed and developed for the desired rendition.

The purpose of this approach is to give the photographer a command of the medium by relating craftsmanship and technique to aesthetic aims. Previsualization is a discipline by which all of the tangible characteristics built into the medium of photography are rendered accessible to the creative photographer.

The Public Image

An image is public when it is understandable by the general public. The photographer's emotional feelings come through visually because: (1) the subject matter is literal, (2) non-literal subject matter is rendered with shared symbols, or (3) titles guide the audience to the desired response.

The Private Image

An image is private when it has a limited audience. If non-literal subject matter is rendered without the use of symbols shared by both photographer and his audience, or if the audience is not sophisticated enough to respond adequately to a photograph, the emotional feelings of the photographer will not come through visually.

Chapter 2

THE THEORIES OF ALFRED STIEGLITZ

In 1902 Alfred Stieglitz announced the formation of a new society, the "Photo-Secession." It stood more for a concept, than it did for a group of photographers. The "Photo-Secession" would prove that pictorial photography was completely different from any other type of photography, that photography could be an art form capable of standing by itself.¹ The Secessionists sought to use photography in a way that would appeal to the emotions of the viewer. Their photography went far beyond commonplace recording. Technique became a means to achieve the expression of beauty and spirit. Technique in itself became unimportant. The Secessionists used values, textures, character, or any other photographic quality which would appeal to the viewer's emotions.

A pictorial style of photography emerged which patterned itself after the Barbizon school of painting. This style of photography depended upon the relation of light and

¹Robert Doty, Photo-Secession Photography as a Fine Art (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, Inc., 1960), p. 28.

color, the softening of sharp lines, and the suppression of details to obtain an impression. The Secessionists consciously copied the work of the painter. Pictorial photography fostered new techniques that enabled the photographer to eliminate the sharp, optically-correct image, one of the unique qualities of the photographic medium and produce a picture that resembled an etching or drawing.²

THE "PHOTO-SECESSION" AS A PROTEST
AGAINST CONVENTIONALITY

The Photo-Secession represented a daring retreat from the conventional and accepted ways of seeing. It actually means a seceding from the accepted idea of what constitutes a photograph. The Secessionists challenged the standards of photography which they considered to be false. They questioned the professional photographer's stereo-typed use of the painted background, papier-mache accessories, the high-backed chair, the potted palm, and artificial flowers in the studio.³

² Ibid.

³ Dorothy Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," Aperture, VIII, 1 (1960), 19; and Doty, op. cit., p. 31.

Photography Compared to Painting

Stieglitz became increasingly aware that with the development of photography, painting and sculpture were free to express something totally fresh. He felt that painting must not be expected to be literally photographic, any more than photography should be asked to resemble painting or etching.⁴

The Photo-Secession established the right for photography to be considered a fine art, but at a price. The techniques of the Secessionists used brush and pigment, soft-focus effects, and print manipulation. Their methods did not take into consideration the unique characteristics of the medium. Robert Doty aptly expressed this idea:

Through their photographs, and the presentation of them in scores of exhibitions, the Secessionists conclusively demonstrated that it was necessary to differentiate between the photograph as visual reporting and the photograph as visual expression. Subject matter itself did not make photography an art; used with aesthetic understanding, it could be an expressive medium. Despite the painterly techniques favored by the Secessionists, their work at its best is beautiful.⁵

In 1909, at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo,

⁴Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 21.

⁵Doty, Photo-Secession Photography, p. 57.

Stieglitz showed unmanipulated prints that were straightforward and consistent with the unique qualities of the photographic process. Stieglitz no longer supported the painterly techniques which had been the basis of so much Secession photography. The organization and the style came to an end.

The Purpose of Camera Work

Camera Work was the official organ of the Photo-Secession. The purpose as outlined in the prospectus of Photo-Secession was "to hold together those Americans devoted to pictorial photography . . . to exhibit the best that has been accomplished by its members or other photographers and above all to dignify that profession until recently looked upon as a trade."⁶ Camera Work gave each artist, writer, and photographer the opportunity to discover new and personal paths.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN ART FORM

Meaningful art, represented for Stieglitz, a symbolical equivalent of what the artist truly experienced. Art is not what one feels one should see or what others have

⁶Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 262.

seen. Of equal importance, one's "seeing" must be communicated with deepest respect both for what one portrays, and the materials by means of which one creates.⁷ Stieglitz approached photography with a sense of wonder. Photography, for him, was really nothing more than an experiment in life--and in technical work.⁸ He believed that the photographer had to care deeply about what he did with all of himself.

Stieglitz discovered, in the late 1880's that he could obtain the same results as those attained by painters. Some artists felt that his photographs were superior to their paintings, but that, unfortunately, photography was not an art. Stieglitz found it difficult to understand why they envied his work, and yet--because it was not handmade --considered it inferior to their own. Then and there, Stieglitz started his struggle for the recognition of photography as a new medium of expression, to be respected in its own right as an art form.⁹

Stieglitz pushed back the technical and aesthetic frontiers of the medium. "Through his photographs and writing, through his publication of other's work, through lectures

⁷ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 6.

⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

and demonstrations, he showed Americans the aesthetic potentials of photography. . . ."10

Stieglitz wrote :

. . . . In order to understand the general and sudden recognition of photography as a means of artistic expression, two things must be kept in view; first, the essentially artistic aims of the modern photographer; second, the means with which he endeavors to attain them.¹¹

Pictorial Photography

According to Stieglitz, photography as a picture-taking medium fell into disrepute because it could be easily accomplished by the general public with very little knowledge required. The ability to make a truly artistic photograph requires feeling, inspiration, artistic instinct, technical knowledge, and hard work. Stieglitz believed photography to be a very severe mental process that taxes the artist's energies even after his technique has become second nature to him. He wrote, "The gist of the matter is what you have to say and how you say it. . . ."12

¹⁰ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 103.

¹¹ Alfred Stieglitz, "Modern Pictorial Photography," The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, Vol. LXIV, 6 (October, 1903), p. 824.

¹² Alfred Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography" (MS in the Stieglitz Archive, Yale University, n.d.), p. 3. (Type-script.)

In the infancy of photography, it was believed that exposure and development of the negative along with selection, posing, and lighting of the subject were mechanical steps that required little or no thought. Later, when serious workers began to realize the great possibilities of the medium, marked changes began to occur. Techniques no longer enslaved the photographer but served to help carry out his creative ideas.¹³

Modern Photography

If a photograph is to have a life of its own, two things are required. First, the photographer must have an understanding and respect for the particular materials used as well as some degree of mastery over them. Secondly, craftsmanship must fuse with the element which relates the product to life. The photograph must therefore be the result of a profound vision and experience of life. Photography requires the difficult process of finding out what your own feelings about the world are and disentangling them from other people's feelings and ideas.¹⁴

The modern photographer can produce almost any effect

¹³ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

¹⁴ George Hyslop, "Modern Photography" (paper read at the Clarence White School, New York, New York, n.d.).

that his taste, skill, and knowledge may dictate. He can control virtually every stage of the making of his picture. There are virtually no limitations to the individuality that can be conveyed in the photographic print. These methods are extremely subtle and personal in character. "For this reason," wrote Stieglitz, "each individual print has a distinct identity of its own that reflects the mood and feeling of its maker at the time of its production. . . ." ¹⁵

Concepts About Portraiture

When Stieglitz photographed people, he demanded the same patience from them that he demanded from himself. He waited and searched for the "living moment" regardless of how many exposures it might take. He liked to photograph a face that reflected an innocence, a state of becoming, struggle, or a feeling of wonder. Stieglitz did not like to photograph people who communicated a feeling of false pride because of having accomplished something. ¹⁶

A Stieglitz portrait reveals empathy between the photographer and the subject. The portraits are compellingly intimate and give one the impression of being in the presence

¹⁵ Alfred Stieglitz, "Modern Pictorial Photography," LXIV, 825.

¹⁶ Dorothy Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," Aperture, VIII 1 (1960), 30.

of the people whom they portray.¹⁷ Stieglitz himself said that when he photographed, he made love. On the other hand, Stieglitz realized that a single photograph could not be a complete portrait of any person. When Georgia O'Keeffe came to New York, Stieglitz made hundreds of photographs of her. In one sense, he made a portrait of a relationship.¹⁸ Sometimes his portraits were single prints; at other times, several prints were grouped as "one portrait" in order to give different aspects of the same subject.

Concepts About the Camera

Although Stieglitz scorned the hand detective camera, he made some of his finest photographs with it. Stieglitz was at first opposed to the hand camera because camera manufacturers had given him the impression that strong sunlight was required. He believed the manufacturer himself did not realize the possibilities of his own invention.¹⁹

¹⁷ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 144.

¹⁸ Beaumont Newhall and Nancy Newhall, Masters of Photography (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958), p. 60.

¹⁹ Alfred Stieglitz, "The Hand Camera--Its Present Importance," Photographers on Photography, ed. by Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 109.

Stieglitz developed his own ideas about hand camera work. He found that the choice of a camera was of vital importance. A suitable lens in a light-tight box was not enough. It had to be easy to operate, so that he could concentrate on the subject. The camera should be waterproof, so as to permit photography in rain or shine without damage to the camera, and the shutter should be reliable.

Stieglitz found that chance and patience entered into successful hand camera work. He felt that some people make an occasional chance hit out of many attempts while others seem to be the regular favorites of chance.²⁰ Stieglitz' working method was to carefully study the lines of the subject and the lighting on that subject. After determining these were suitable, Stieglitz watched the passing figures and waited for the moment in which everything was in balance and satisfied his eye. It might be necessary for him to wait for hours. On the other hand, Stieglitz still might not get the desired picture.²¹

STIEGLITZ ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

General Concepts About Craftsmanship

Stieglitz cared a great deal about fine craftsmanship.

²⁰Ibid., p. 110. ²¹Ibid.

He worked endlessly and tirelessly to achieve a perfect print. ". . . If a spot were to appear on one of his photographs or mounts, he would be heartsick. . . ." ²²

Stieglitz at 19 was already a perfectionist. When he was studying at Berlin Polytechnic under Hermann Vogel, Stieglitz stuck to assignments until Vogel explained that the absolute is unattainable. ²³ He realized that perfection is an unattainable state, but despite his compassion for imperfection, he possessed a passion for perfection itself. ²⁴ Stieglitz had an uncompromising attitude towards everything he ever did. For example, all of the illustrations in Camera Work were stuck in by hand. If there was an error, it was corrected. ²⁵

For Stieglitz, an imperfectly exposed negative or one blurred by camera movement meant failure. His portraits were made under a skylight with about three-second exposures.

²² Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 57.

²³ Beaumont Newhall and Nancy Newhall, Masters of Photography, p. 60.

²⁴ Dorothy Norman, "Fatalist With One Eye On Fate" (MS in the Stieglitz Archive, Yale University, n.d.), p. 9. (Typescript.)

²⁵ Statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Alfred Stieglitz, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 5, 1966.

He used an 8 x 10 view camera with a Steinheil lens and no shutter. During the exposure, Stieglitz manipulated a large white reflector to balance the overhead light. He developed his negatives one at a time in a tray. He made contact prints on platinum paper and each finished print would receive a coat of wax for added gloss and brilliance.²⁶

Stieglitz worked simply and without trickery. He worked without artificial light and from unretouched negatives. After his famous photograph, "The Steerage," Stieglitz only made contact prints, but he found from experience that contact prints from hand camera negatives had little value as such. Stieglitz began to use the hand camera with the express purpose of enlargement, and it was rare when he did not crop the original photograph.

As printing methods improved, Stieglitz was able to control every stage of the making of his picture. As changes came about in the medium, Stieglitz' concepts underwent a change. At one time, Stieglitz believed that each print was an individual experience and couldn't be turned out in mass production. Later he found that any number of prints could be produced from a single negative. The prints could be

²⁶ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 144.

indistinguishably alike and yet significantly alive.²⁷

Craftsmanship and the Living Element

Stieglitz could be lenient about imperfections in his work and in the work of others if the spirit of what had been done seemed right to him. He believed that if the photograph is to have a life of its own, it not only demands craftsmanship but that indefinable something which relates the photograph to life itself. A photograph must be the result of a profound vision. It must be an experience of life.²⁸ Craftsmanship can be developed. "The living element" can be developed if it is potentially there. It cannot be taught or given. It is conditioned by your own living--a way of living that involves finding out what your feeling about the world is and disentangling it from other peoples' feelings and ideas.²⁹ If photographic work is to satisfy, it should be the best one is capable of and born of a sacred feeling.

Stieglitz knew what he wanted to do with the material at hand. In his later work, he felt that he controlled

²⁷ Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 266; and Stieglitz, "The Hand Camera--Its Present Importance," p. 110.

²⁸ George Hyslop, "Modern Photography" (paper read at the Clarence White School, New York, New York, n.d.).

²⁹ Ibid.

photography. But, despite his wish to control the photographic medium, Stieglitz realized that the 100 percent perfect work may be spiritually dead--the things that are seemingly incomplete may have life and vitality.³⁰

Stieglitz preferred the imperfect work with spirit to the so-called perfect work that lacked spirit. Unless a photograph is created as a scientific entity, that will stand up for a hundred years, it is more important that it should come out of an inner need or must.³¹ It is possible to struggle too hard for perfection. If the photographer feels that his work must be perfect before he presents it to the public, he may strive for something even beyond what he has achieved. In struggling too hard for perfection, he may lose the very glimmer of life or spirit that would otherwise exist. On the other hand, by letting the work go out even knowing that it is not perfect, he might avoid the destruction of that very living quality.³² Stieglitz believed that to practice in public was justifiable because otherwise the world would never see the finished product 90 percent of the time.

Stieglitz disliked virtuosity for its own sake. He

³⁰ Norman, "Fatalist With One Eye On Fate," p. 7.

³¹ Ibid., p. 8. ³² Ibid., p. 7.

felt the need for something more than the technically "perfect photograph." In a letter to Ansel Adams, Stieglitz wrote:

. . . I feel that the photographs, with maybe two or three exceptions, are primarily supremely competent and that young Weston [Brett] has not as yet shown anything that I might call "his own"--at least that's my reaction. It may be as he gains in life experience, he may find the inner need to say something in photography that will prove that he is not only a very good technician, but will have become a "force" that is creative.³³

On the other hand, Stieglitz felt that Edward Weston's photographs had a sense of beauty quite their own. He wrote Ansel Adams that Edward Weston's photographs made him forget the thing he alluded to as virtuosity.³⁴

Stieglitz was not dogmatically insistent on sharpness. He photographed a beautiful nude torso slightly out of focus, producing broad, soft effects, when this effect seemed appropriate for such controversial subject matter.³⁵ It was the same with placing the major emphasis on textures or on startling effects of any kind. He would, on the whole, take

³³ Letter from Alfred Stieglitz to Ansel Adams, June 6, 1940.

³⁴ Letter from Alfred Stieglitz to Ansel Adams, June 7, 1940.

³⁵ Helmut Gernsheim, Creative Photography (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1962), p. 101.

the longest possible exposures, shutting down the aperture as much as circumstances would permit, but nothing became a fetish with him. Soft-focus negatives, double exposures, and the use of the accidental were justified if they intensified communication. Anything was justified, providing the final image was expressed with passion, with deepest feeling, and with integrity.³⁶

The living element was a vital consideration to Stieglitz in the way in which he approached photography. He felt that if the spirit of the original is lost in reproduction, nothing is preserved. He did not object to the reproduction of his work if his work were properly interpreted, if the spirit were preserved, and if the reproductions had a clean feeling--an absolute integrity of their own.³⁷

In 1931, when the printing process was incapable of preserving the life-giving qualities within the photograph, Stieglitz did not allow his photographs to be reproduced. He felt that the quality of touch, in its deepest living sense, was inherent in his photographs. If that were lost, the photograph would lose its sense of life. That is why

³⁶ Dorothy Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," Aperture, III, 4 (1955), 16.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

he did not give permission for his photographs to be reproduced.³⁸

STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

The Unique Qualities of the Photographic Medium

In the Photo-Secession galleries, known as "291," Stieglitz demonstrated the potential of photography as a fine art. In 1907, just two years after the "291" galleries opened, Stieglitz came to the conclusion that many photographs which he exhibited were not art but an imitation of art.³⁹

Stieglitz was to become a consistent advocate of the integrity of Straight Photography. Because of his influence, a reaction set in against the manipulated print, which owed more to the ingenuity of the photographer than to photography. In 1902, at the opening of the Photo-Secession exhibition, Stieglitz said that it was justifiable to use any means upon a negative or paper to attain the desired end.⁴⁰ He now questioned what means could be used to achieve those ends.

³⁸ Dorothy Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," Aperture, VIII, 1 (1960), 56.

³⁹ Beaumont Newhall and Nancy Newhall, Masters of Photography (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1958), p. 60.

⁴⁰ Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 261.

The concept of Straight Photography stands upon the premise that painting shouldn't resemble photography and photography shouldn't resemble painting or etching. It is based upon the belief that photography will develop an expression and a beauty evolved out of its own technique, and it will not be like painting or any other branch of art. Its characteristics must differ from those of the other arts, just as pastel painting is different from oil technique. It can never be free from the laws of art, because all art has fundamental principles. It will absorb these basic laws, and its technique will be influenced by them.⁴¹

Stieglitz, from the beginning, fought for photography's right to be judged on its own merits. He refused to attempt to imitate other media. He would speak of his passion to have everything straightforward--no diffusion lenses, no tricks, no retouching. He believed that if the photographic product is not based on the inherent qualities of the medium, the result will be neither art nor photograph.⁴² He realized that every medium has its limitations as well as its

⁴¹O. W. Beck, "The Art Education of the Photographer," Camera Notes, V, 1 (July, 1901), 4.

⁴²George Hyslop, "Modern Photography" (paper read at the Clarence White School, New York, New York, n.d.), p. 9.

own unique qualities. The photographic medium will register a scale of tonal values in black and white far beyond the human eye or hand. It can record the differentiation of the textures of objects, as the human hand cannot. The form of objects, relative color value, texture, and line are elements that the photographer must learn to control and understand. The camera cannot evade what is in front of it any more than the photographer can. He can choose these objects and arrange them before exposure but not afterward.⁴³

The soft-focus lens destroys the solidity of form, the differentiation of texture, and the line. By introducing pigments, the photographer destroys the extraordinary differentiation of textures possible only to photography and the subtlety of tonality.⁴⁴

The question of "pure photography" could not be settled by accepting this or rejecting that technique; what mattered was the photographer's intent, taste, and vision. Stieglitz, for example, pushed technique beyond the accepted limits. The hand camera, which had been regarded as unworthy of the serious worker, became a challenge to Alfred Stieglitz. He photographed not in direct sunlight, but in the poorest

⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

of lighting conditions. He broke down the prejudice towards lantern slides and worked out ingenious techniques for controlling the contrast and tone of the slide by chemical means.⁴⁵

The gum-bichromate process had enabled the photographer to apply sensitized pigment with a brush, building up weak areas or painting out and washing away undesirable sections or details. But, it had deprived the photographer from utilizing the full potential of his medium. Straight Photography opened up new challenges. Stieglitz, for example, realized that ordinary everyday scenes had not been sufficiently explored. He set out to show that this was a field offering ample scope for the creative photographer, without the need to stoop to any artifices.⁴⁶

THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND IN PHOTOGRAPHY

Stieglitz did not deal at length with the role of the subconscious mind in photography, but he did understand its importance in creative expression. Mrs. Dorothy Norman, who queried Stieglitz about his philosophies on life, art, and

⁴⁵ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 103.

⁴⁶ Gernsheim, Creative Photography, p. 142.

photography, described Stieglitz' thoughts on the role of the subconscious in this way:

The subconscious, pushing through the conscious, driven by an urge coming from beyond its own knowing, its own control, trying to live in the light, like the seed pushing up through the earth, will alone have roots, can alone be fertile. All idealism that does not have such roots must be sterile, must defeat itself.⁴⁷

Stieglitz worked in a manner that permitted the subconscious mind to "take over" and play a role in his creative work. He made use of the accidental and unplanned in his photography if the result was satisfying.⁴⁸ He discovered the concept of the equivalent whereby the subject matter becomes a symbol of the photographer's inner feelings. When he photographed, it was because of some deep inner need.⁴⁹

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT

The Photographer's State of Mind

Photography, like painting, sculpture, literature, and music is a medium that allows the individual to express his feelings. If the photographer has aesthetic perception, if he feels living beauty in what is before his eyes and wishes to photograph it, he can get the spirit of it through

⁴⁷Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 21.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 30.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 36.

the camera as well as the painter can through paint.⁵⁰

"Seeing," for Stieglitz, signified an awareness resulting from his inner experience--but not from the experience of another. He pleaded with people to see and feel for themselves.⁵¹ No experience was truly completed for Stieglitz until he had recorded it with words or with camera. "He photographed in words those incidents that had meaning for him, much as he photographed with a camera those moments that moved him."⁵² He believed that a work of art must be created with a sense of sacredness, a sense of wonder. We can gain an insight into how Stieglitz must have felt from his description of how he photographed The Flat Iron Building:

One day during the winter season of 1902-03, there was a great snowstorm. I loved such storms. The Flat Iron Building had been erected on 23rd Street, at the junction of Fifth Avenue and Broadway. I stood spellbound as I saw that building in that storm. I had watched the structure in the course of its erection, but, somehow, it had never occurred to me to photograph it in the stages of its evolution. But that particular day, with the trees of Madison Square all covered with snow--fresh snow--I suddenly saw the building as I had never seen it before. It looked, from where I stood, as though it were moving toward me like the bow of a monster ocean-steamer--a picture of the new America that was still in the making. . . .

⁵⁰ Editorial in the New York Sun, March 14, 1922.

⁵¹ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 4.

⁵² Ibid.

Later, when I saw the Flat Iron Building again, after many years of having seen other tall buildings in New York City shooting into the sky--the Woolworth Building, and then still others--it did seem rather ugly and unattractive to me. There was a certain gloom about it. It no longer seemed handsome to me. It no longer represented the coming age. It did not tempt me to photograph it. . . . But the feeling, the passion I experienced at that earlier time for the building, still exists in me. I still can feel the glory of those many hours, and those many days, when I stood on Fifth Avenue lost in wonder, looking at the Flat Iron Building. . . .⁵³

Stieglitz never lost that sense of wonder. In the catalog for the 1921 Anderson Galleries exhibition, which took place in New York, Stieglitz wrote: ". . . Every print I make, even from one negative, is a new experience, a new problem. . . . Photography is my passion. The search for truth my obsession."⁵⁴

Stieglitz made no attempt to interpret what was before his camera. He did not project himself or his mannerisms into his photography.⁵⁵ He believed that objects that are included in a photograph must be felt and recorded as the

⁵³ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 16.

⁵⁴ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 113.

⁵⁵ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 144.

living differentiated things that they are. They must also be considered as shapes and textures.⁵⁶ Photography is basically an objective medium, but the same scene can look different to different persons. A scene can also look different to the same person when he has different moods.⁵⁷

The creative photographer has to have a clear idea about what he is doing and what he wants to do, but this need not stand in the way of experimentation. Everything that Stieglitz did was the result of experimentation. But, the content of a Stieglitz photograph is the result of what he lived and felt. Stieglitz did not photograph haphazardly for effects. He photographed when a certain feeling about life became clear to him, and when something appeared that he felt was related to something he had already experienced. When something moved him and when he could express something out of actual living experience, he photographed. He believed that photography could only function as a universal language when a thing is felt all the way through, lived, seen through,

⁵⁶ George Hyslop, "Modern Photography" (paper read at the Clarence White School, New York, New York, n.d.), p. 4.

⁵⁷ Alfred Stieglitz (untitled MS in the Stieglitz Archive, Yale University, 1915), p. 2. (Typescript.)

experienced completely, and controlled in the way it is put down.⁵⁸

Inner vision has to feel itself satisfied plastically, by the way in which materials are used. The photographer must be aware of the qualities of the subject even though such things as balance, tactile sensations, a sense of pattern, or feelings about the subject matter are, in themselves, only starting points.⁵⁹

In his latest work, Stieglitz turned from the things which people do or build, directly to the things which people are.⁶⁰ The early work of Stieglitz was different from his later work because times were changing. Stieglitz said that he felt the same way about the subject matter and would not have photographed differently, if he saw what it was that made him take those early pictures.⁶¹

Photography of an Inner State of Mind

Every photograph Stieglitz made is a record of some

⁵⁸ Dorothy Norman, "Fatalist With One Eye On Fate" (MS in the Stieglitz Archive, Yale University, n.d.), pp. 4-5. (Typescript.)

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁰ Paul Strand, "Alfred Stieglitz and a Machine" (MS in the Stieglitz Archive, Yale University, February 14, 1921), p. 3. (Printed privately in New York.)

⁶¹ Norman, op. cit., p. 5.

inner state that determined the way he felt about what he photographed, the kind of print that he made, and how he presented it.⁶² "Photography brings what is not visible to the surface," Stieglitz once said.⁶³ "As for subject matter," he would state, "it has no significance whatever short of what the artist does with it."⁶⁴ He photographed when there was a possibility of sharing what he experienced. He had to have a positive feeling about what he saw. When he did not see or feel, he simply remained silent. He preferred not to photograph at all than to put down something that lacked quality, meaning, and life.⁶⁵ He once wrote: ". . . In my opinion the most difficult problem in photography is to learn to see. All else is comparatively simple. . . ."⁶⁶

Stieglitz' photographs portray a crucial awareness of all that is most essential, both in man's own nature and in the universe as a whole.⁶⁷ His photographs of isolated, gentle-looking workmen, taken in the 1890's, symbolized for

⁶² Ibid., p. 2.

⁶³ Dorothy Norman, Introduction to an American Seer (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1960), p. 12.

⁶⁴ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 11.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

him, his own sense of alienation and aloneness.⁶⁸ In 1907, on a trip to Europe, Stieglitz photographed *The Steerage*, a picture which he considered to be his finest. About this photograph, he said: ". . . I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that the feeling I had about life."⁶⁹

Subject matter became a vehicle by which Stieglitz could express his feelings about life. A mechanically printed piece of paper could be controlled. The photograph could breathe its own spiritual life.⁷⁰

Essence of the Subject vs. Projection of the Photographer

Stieglitz believed that it was necessary to lose himself--that the subject had to take over or he would be disappointed.⁷¹ What one does," he said, "is to put down what one sees before one's eyes. One sees what is happening and one puts it down without any preconceived idea of what ought to happen, without any theory. . . ."⁷² Despite the deeply

⁶⁸ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 11.

⁶⁹ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 143.

⁷⁰ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 22-24.

⁷¹ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 42.

⁷² Norman, "Fatalist With One Eye On Fate," p. 3.

personal nature of his photographs, Stieglitz never attempted to project or to assert himself. What is seen is the very essence of that which has been photographed.⁷³

Georgia Engelhard aptly expressed this idea when she wrote:

You don't just look at a pleasing scene or a pretty face when you study his photographs. What you see is the essence of tree or sky or woman, almost as life itself. He has caught the pulse and essence of the universe in whatever he portrayed, whether it was the wretched horses shivering in the snow in the horse-car days of his youth, the tender beauty of a woman's body, or the mechanical perfection of our civilization of today as represented by skyscrapers, soaring and soulless. . . .⁷⁴

THE EQUIVALENT

The equivalent theory started with a series of cloud photographs made at Lake George, New York, in 1922. Stieglitz made them for a musician friend, and the feelings which were created in him by the photographs evidenced themselves as music. Stieglitz was delighted. The feelings within the photographer were not the same but equivalent.⁷⁵ Stieglitz

⁷³ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 19.

⁷⁴ Georgia Engelhard, "Alfred Stieglitz," American Photography, XXXIX (April, 1945), 9.

⁷⁵ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

described what had taken place:

I knew exactly what I was after--a series of photographs which Ernest Bloch would explain, Music! Music! Man, why that is music! How did you ever do that? And he would point to violins, and flutes, and oboes, and brass, full of enthusiasm. . . . And when finally I had my series of ten photographs printed, and Bloch saw them--what I said I wanted to happen, happened verbatim.⁷⁶

Stieglitz began to photograph clouds in order to answer a challenge. He wished to show that his success in portraiture was not due to a kind of hypnotic power that he exerted over the sitter--despite the force of his personality.

I wanted to photograph clouds to find out what I had learned in forty years about photography. Through clouds to put down my philosophy of life--to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter--not to special trees, or faces, or interiors, to special privileges--clouds were there for everyone--no tax as yet on them--free.⁷⁷

Clouds had been on Stieglitz' mind since the late 19th century, when he experimented with ortho plates and cloud pictures in Murren, Switzerland. There he attempted to show clouds and their relationship to the rest of the world, and clouds for themselves.⁷⁸ Later, on a hillside at Lake George, he had an unusual opportunity to photograph them.

⁷⁶ Alfred Stieglitz, "Why I Photograph Clouds," Amateur Photographer, LVI, 1819 (September 19, 1923), 255.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Stieglitz explained why he chose to use clouds as subject matter:

. . . I have found that the use of clouds as subject matter in my photographs has made people less aware of clouds as clouds in the pictures than when I have used trees or houses or wood or any other objects. In looking at the photographs of clouds people seem to feel free to think about the actual relationships in the pictures than about the subject-matter as such. So that what I have been trying to say through my photographs seems most clearly communicated in the series of Songs of the Sky, where the true meaning of the Equivalents--as I have called this particular series (in reality all my photographs are equivalents)--comes through directly without any extraneous or distracting pictorial or representational factors coming between those who look at the pictures and the pictures themselves.⁷⁹

The equivalent, like all abstract art, functions on a very personal level. Its meaning is never quite specific. In the abstract relationships of shape, tone, and line, Stieglitz expressed the equivalents of human relationship and feeling. Paul Strand, who was a student and protege of Alfred Stieglitz, wrote: "They contain feelings of grandeur, of conflict, of struggle and release, of ecstasy and despair, life and blotting out of life. . . ."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Dorothy Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz on Photography," Magazine of Art, XLIII, 8 (December, 1950), 300.

⁸⁰ Paul Strand, "Stieglitz An Appraisal," Popular Photography, XXI, 1 (July, 1947), 96-98.

Beaumont Newhall has expressed what takes place in a Stieglitz cloud equivalent:

. . . The sky becomes less sky and more something else, and that something else becomes what the equivalent was. He felt that through this form he could express his feelings; that these were equivalent to his feeling. . . .⁸¹

Stieglitz believed that all experiences in life are one, if truly seen. What one puts down in any particular form must be an equivalent of any other truly felt experience.⁸² The equivalent, for Stieglitz, was an outward manifestation of his inner feelings.⁸³ The equivalent was also used to materialize how Stieglitz felt about a person.⁸⁴ When he was moved by something, Stieglitz felt a passionate desire to make a lasting equivalent of it. But, what he put down, had to be as perfect in itself as the experience that generated his original feeling.⁸⁵ He believed that you cannot be told about such phenomena as sunsets or love. The

⁸¹Statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Alfred Stieglitz, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 5, 1966.

⁸²Norman, Introduction to an American Seer, p. 36.

⁸³Dorothy Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz Visionary Photographer," Art in America, XLVI, 3 (Fall, 1958), 56.

⁸⁴Minor White, "On the Strength of a Mirage," Art in America, XLVI, 1 (Spring, 1958), 53.

⁸⁵Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 15.

essence, of such things, can only be learned through oneself. We cannot even absorb the experience of others, through an equivalent of what they have felt, until we ourselves have experienced the spirit of what they have created.⁸⁶

It was important for Stieglitz to hold or preserve the "moment." He used the word "moment" when he referred to an experience that moved him deeply. He wished to put down this experience so completely that when he looked at the photograph, he would re-live the original experience.⁸⁷

He was interested in putting down an image of what he saw, not what it meant to him. He said:

. . . It is only after I have put down an equivalent of what has moved me that I can even begin to think about its meaning. I have to have experienced something that moves me and is beginning to take form within me, before I can see what are called "shapes." Shapes, as such, mean nothing to me unless I happen to be feeling something within, of which an equivalent appears in outer form.

With others, shapes often are of interest in themselves. To me all this has nothing to do with photography. It has to do mainly with that which is merely pictorial.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Waldo Frank and others, America & Alfred Stieglitz (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1934), p. 130.

⁸⁷Norman, loc cit.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 16.

RESPONSES TO PHOTOGRAPHS

The creative artist should be confronted with his own work and his own growth. For the artist to be able to see his own work in public, year after year, is the best possible test of that work.⁸⁹ If a work has the universal power to move others, then it will have life. Otherwise, the artist will speak only to himself.⁹⁰ The test of a photograph's value, as creative expression, is to place it beside the best of the old masters. If it continues to live, and has a life of its own, it is worthwhile.⁹¹

One should look at a picture for what is actually there and for what it says--not for the effects that were used and how they were achieved.⁹² "When" and "how" a photograph was taken has nothing to do with the essential life of a picture. People who speculate too much about the technical aspects of a photograph, never see the picture itself.⁹³

Stieglitz experimented to find out how people

⁸⁹ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 25.

⁹⁰ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 15.

⁹¹ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz," VIII, 29.

⁹² Norman, "Fatalist With One Eye On Fate," p. 1.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 22.

responded to his photographs. He would place an equivalent before someone, turn it slowly, stand it in its four possible positions, and ask in which position it meant the most. By performing this experiment, he found that he learned a great deal, not only about the picture itself, but about the basic attitudes or dominant feelings of the viewer. For example, a preference for an upward movement of clouds must signify something different from a preference towards a downward sweep.⁹⁴

Stieglitz hoped that people would respond to his photographs for the feelings that were expressed within them or the spirit that they possessed. His aim was to make his photographs look so much like everyday photographs that unless they were seen with great perception, they would not be seen. He hoped that they would never be forgotten, having once been looked at.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Norman, "Alfred Stieglitz-Seer," III, 21.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

Chapter 3

THE THEORIES OF EDWARD WESTON

Edward Weston wrote that his work-purpose was to recognize, record, and present in his photography the interdependence and relativity of all things--the universality of basic form.¹ In his photographs, the fragment becomes a symbol for the whole of life. A cloud becomes more than just a cloud. The blossom of the fruit tree becomes more than a blossom. It is the tree itself. In this way, Weston went beyond the documentation of subject matter. He revealed its significance.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN ART FORM

Weston was stimulated by modern, abstract art. He broke away from salon photography after he was introduced to modern art, creative music, and contemporary literature at the San Francisco Fair of 1915.³ Throughout his life,

¹Jacob Deschin, "Viewpoint," Popular Photography, LIX, 5 (November, 1966), 18.

²Ibid.

³Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 323.

Weston felt that he was moved more by music, literature, painting, and sculpture than by photography. He never felt the need to compete with or imitate other creative photographers. But, seeing, hearing, or reading something fine inspired him to create and stirred his emotional soul.⁴

Weston's Approach to Photography

Weston never tried to limit himself by theories. He didn't question whether an approach was right or wrong. He expressed the belief that the artist should dare to experiment--consider any urge--if it takes him in a new direction, all the better. He dared to be irrational because he realized that logic and absolute rationalism could be straight jackets.⁵ Weston was a discoverer. He did not wish to impose himself or his ideas on the subject. He wished to identify himself in, and unify with, whatever he was able to recognize as significantly a part of himself within universal rhythms.⁶ In his Daybooks, he wrote:

. . . Clouds, torsos, shells, peppers, trees,
rocks, smokestacks are but interdependent,

⁴ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, Vol. II, The Daybooks of Edward Weston (New York: Horizon Press, 1966), p. 234.

⁵ Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," Aperture, VI, 1 (1958), 42.

⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

interrelated parts of a whole, which is life. Life rhythms felt in no matter what, become symbols of the whole.

The creative force in man recognizes and records these rhythms with the medium most suitable to him, to the object, or the moment, feeling the cause, the life within the outer form. Recording unfelt facts by acquired rule, results in sterile inventory.⁷

Photography as a Fine Art

Edward Weston defined art as an outer expression of inner growth. Art cannot be learned from books of rules. Art is a living thing that demands our full participation. "As we grow in life," Weston wrote, "so we grow in art, each of us in his unique way."⁸ Personal growth is all that counts. It can be achieved by remaining ready and eager to change.⁹

Photography can be a vital new way of seeing. Its possibilities have only been touched upon. Every photographer sees differently and the camera sees differently than the eyes.¹⁰

⁷ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 154.

⁸ Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," VI, 2.

⁹ Edward Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 157.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 155.

As an art medium, photography can extend visual horizons by opening our eyes to new perspectives and new subject matter. It is a direct medium. Conception and execution so nearly coincide that a prolific artist can produce a tremendous volume of quality work. On the other hand, successful camera work demands a trained eye, keen perception, a sure disciplined technique, swift creative judgment, and something to say.¹¹

Creative Photography

Photography as a creative and expressive medium must involve something more than seeing alone. Seeing alone means factual recording.¹² There is no reason for recording the obvious. If photography is documentary, why not document the extraordinary? Nature has everything that can possibly be imagined by the artist. Through objective recording, the camera can express ideas just as abstract as those conceived by the painter or sculptor.¹³

¹¹ Edward Weston, "Photographic Art," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1946), XVII, 799.

¹² Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 240.

¹³ Ibid., p. 252.

Weston's Style

Weston believed that the approach to photography is through realism. Alfaro Siqueiros, the Mexican painter of protest, wrote this review of Weston's show at Guadalajara in 1925:

In Weston's photographs, the texture--the physical quality--of things is rendered with the utmost exactness: the rough is rough, the smooth is smooth, flesh is alive, stone is hard. The things have a definite proportion and weight and are placed in a clearly defined distance one from the other. In a word, the beauty which these photographs of Weston's possess is photographic beauty!¹⁴

This desire for realism led Weston to adopt a working methodology that is now commonly associated with him--the 8 x 10 negative contact printed on glossy paper. He demanded clarity of form and wanted every area of his picture clear-cut, with the substances and textures of things appreciable to the point of illusion.¹⁵

PHOTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS

General Concepts

The purpose of the photographic print is to convey

¹⁴ Pollack, The Picture History of Photography, p. 323.

¹⁵ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 159.

to others how the photographer responded to his subject. The greatest asset that the photographer has is the directness of his medium. "But this advantage can only be retained," wrote Weston, "if he simplifies his equipment and technique to the minimum necessary, and keeps his approach free from all formula, art-dogma, rules and taboos. . . ." ¹⁶ Through the simplification of his approach to photography, the photographer frees himself to put his vision to use in discovering and revealing the world around him. ¹⁷

Weston believed that in most mediums the artist is retarded by his process. Even in a lifetime he may not bring to birth a fraction of what he conceives. The photographer, on the other hand, can realize and execute in almost the same spontaneous instant. He is limited only by his ability to see and to create. ¹⁸ Limitations and potentialities of the medium become equally important, and should be thoroughly understood, because they can condition how we

¹⁶ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), IX, 3206.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), p. 10.

express ourselves and predetermine our objective.¹⁹ Weston never allowed limitations, that were placed upon him, to interfere with his creative work. When Point Lobos, California, was under Army jurisdiction during World War II, he worked with objects, animals, and people.²⁰

He photographed anything that excited him. He didn't search for unusual subject matter or use extraordinary techniques. He made the commonplace unusual.²¹ When the subject matter was marvelous, Weston could not help but create something of interest. His work has vitality because he reveals the living world to others and shows them what their own unseeing eyes have missed.²²

He sometimes looked for suitable backgrounds for found objects. He would take these objects with him occasionally, and did not consider this manner of working artificial if the objects did not look placed or if they were

¹⁹ Edward Weston, "A Contemporary Means to Creative Expression," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 158.

²⁰ Pollack, The Picture History of Photography, p. 326.

²¹ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 155.

²² Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," VI, 25.

frankly placed. Outright faking was objectionable, but Weston felt that selection in the field is only another form of arrangement with the camera being moved instead of the subject.²³

The salon photographers in Weston's time, and even today, have had to abide by so-called "rules of composition." Weston compared this idea of consulting the "rules of composition" before making a picture to consulting the law of gravitation before going for a walk. "Such rules and laws," he wrote, "are deduced from the accomplished fact; they are the products of reflection and after the examination, and are in no way a part of the creative impetus. . . ."²⁴ There can be no freshness of vision when subject matter is forced to fit into preconceived patterns. Following the rules of composition can only lead to a monotonous repetition of visual cliches. Good composition cannot be taught; it is a matter of personal growth. It is the strongest way of seeing the subject.²⁵ Art must be more than pattern and

²³ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 226.

²⁴ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 163.

²⁵ Ibid.

form, Weston concluded, for otherwise anyone could learn to compose by rule and be an artist.²⁶

If the photographer fails, he should not accept the failures as valid statements but should make another attempt.²⁷ On one occasion, Weston made five attempts to improve a shell arrangement he was working on. He discarded the fourth attempt as unsatisfactory because his discerning eye noticed that one important upright line was not quite as fine as his third attempt.²⁸ Art is based on order. Without the ability to overcome carelessness, to create order, no one can reach great heights as an artist, or anything else. "The world is full of sloppy 'Bohemians,'" wrote Weston, "and their work betrays them."²⁹

Weston held the belief that comparing one man's work to another is a wrong approach. The important questions are: (1) Is the artist a finer artist today than he was yesterday,

²⁶ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 151.

²⁷ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, Vol. I, The Daybooks of Edward Weston (New York: Wittenborn & Company, 1961), p. 106.

²⁸ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 23.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

and (2) Has he fulfilled his potential?³⁰

Weston wrote in his Daybooks that he learned more from a direct communion with nature, which is the final step in growth, than from the inspiration of other workers.³¹ He believed that to take ideas, without understanding them, is merely imitation. He went to photographic exhibits more to see what was being done technically, that he might use, than to see the other man's viewpoint. He believed that the other man's viewpoint seldom gave him anything.³²

Concepts About Portraiture

There is a difference between portraits and mere pictures of people. In a portrait, the photographer's primary purpose is to reveal the individual before his camera--to transfer the living quality of that individual to the finished print.³³ The aim of good portraiture in any medium is not to make superficial likenesses, but to capture and record the essential truth of the subject. Portrait photography should show more than how a person looks physically, but it should show what that person is.³⁴ Pictures

³⁰ Ibid., p. 71.

³¹ Ibid., p. 235.

³² Ibid.

³³ Edward Weston, "Portrait Photography," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), VIII, 2935.

³⁴ Ibid.

of people can include: passport pictures, casual snapshots, most "candid camera" work, "glamorized" commercial work, and photographs that are labeled portraits but in reality the photographer paid more attention to lighting and composition than to the subject.³⁵

"The chief charm of a photographic portrait," wrote Weston, "lies in its intense reality, its ability to vividly represent a living person."³⁶ This quality depends upon the integrity of the photographic image. Retouching has the capacity to destroy this integrity of image.³⁷

The most accurate and realistic drawing cannot compete with the photograph in providing a vivid representation of a living person. A drawing lacks the quality of authenticity that makes us want to accept the photograph as a genuine likeness. Authenticity, however, depends for its existence on the clarity and precision of the photographic image. If the integrity of the photographic image has been destroyed, then the quality of authenticity is lost and the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Edward Weston, "Thirty-Five Years of Portraiture," Camera Craft, XLVI, 10 (October, 1939), 450.

³⁷ Ibid.

picture might just as well have been a drawing in the first place.³⁸

Camera vision is unselective and impartial. It is confined to a single moment of time. The human eye, on the other hand, does not record the single isolated moment. Human vision is selective. We see what we choose to see. We superimpose flattering images from our memory upon friends. In the case of strangers, we are likely to settle upon some dominant feature and fill in a misty balance to accompany that single feature.³⁹

The photographic portrait must always consist of arrested motion. But, the photograph will not look like arrested motion if the photographer seizes on those moments when the motion suggests repose. We may photograph a still-life when we please, taking as long as we please, and it will remain approximately still and unchanging. Portraiture is not like this. The human expression changes constantly. No look or gesture is ever repeated or even "held," since in the very moment it is present it is already in the process of becoming something else.⁴⁰

³⁸Weston, "Portrait Photography," VIII, 2936.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Weston expressed the idea that the portrait photographer is faced with a two-fold task:

. . .Its physical part consists of learning to use the camera selectively, to govern its all-seeing eye so that his results will corroborate the testimony of human vision; its psychological part consists of learning to govern his subject with equal skill, in order to draw forth that quality that his camera is to record.⁴¹

Unfortunately, the tendency has been to concentrate on the physical part at the expense of the psychological part. But, even the physical problem has most often been attacked incorrectly. Soft-focus lenses, vignettters, and retouching were introduced to portrait photography in order to "correct" the camera's vision. None of these devices has ever provided a satisfactory solution, since they all impair photographic quality.⁴²

Weston approached portraiture the same as he did any other subject matter. He did not wish to impose his personality upon the sitter, but kept himself open to receive reactions from the sitter's own special personality. He recorded this with nothing added.⁴³ He wrote in his Daybooks:

. . .I must dominate in a very subtle way,

⁴¹Ibid., p. 2937.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 242.

I must depend upon "chance"--if there is such a thing. To present to me at the moment when my camera is ready, the person revealed, and capture that moment in a fraction of a second or a few seconds, with no opportunity to alter my result. A painter or sculptor may see as quickly as I do, but they can carry their conception on mentally, change it, or if the model changes in mood or position, keep on with their original idea in mind. Photography's great difficulty lies in the necessary coincidence of the sitter's revealment, the photographer's realization, the camera's readiness. But when these elements do coincide, portraits in any other medium, sculpture or painting, are cold dead things in comparison. In the very overcoming of the mechanical difficulties which would seem to restrict the camera, and does if one is not aware, and turns these apparent barriers to advantage, lies its tremendous strength. For when the perfect spontaneous union is consummated, a human document, the very bones of life are bared. . . .⁴⁴

In his portraiture, Weston let the subjects reveal themselves while he watched for fleeting expressions and gestures. Of his portrait of Guadalupe Marin de Rivera he wrote:

I am finishing the portrait of Lupe. It is a heroic head, the best I have done in Mexico. With the Graflex, in direct sunlight I caught her, mouth open, talking and what could be more characteristic of Lupe. . . .⁴⁵

Weston wrote this in regard to a portrait of Tina Modotti:

. . . We had long planned that I should do her as I have often seen her, quoting poetry--

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 162.

⁴⁵Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," Aperture, VI, 1 (1958), 9.

to attempt the registration of her remarkably mobile face in action. There was nothing forced in this attempt, she was soon in a mood which discounted me and my camera--or did she subconsciously feel my presence and respond to it? Within twenty minutes I had made three dozen Graflex negatives and caught her sensitive face with its every subtle change.⁴⁶

Weston failed technically in this sitting through underexposure, but he felt that the series of heads were the most significant he had ever made. His vision on the ground glass and recognition of the critical moment for release were in absolute accord with Tina's emotional crises.⁴⁷

According to Weston, the first and most important problem in photographic portraiture is to achieve spontaneity. The portrait photographer must deal in psychology without the sitter knowing it. He must be in complete control of the sitter at all times but the sitter must never be aware that he is.⁴⁸

The photographer must learn to swiftly recognize characteristic gestures or postures of the sitter. He must reveal the true essence of the person before him. In

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Weston, "Thirty-Five Years of Portraiture," XLVI, 454.

addition, he must be a fine technician. Any fumbling or hesitation on the photographer's part will be instantly perceived by the sitter. The photographer's uncertainty will make the sitter self-conscious. His confidence will put the sitter at ease.⁴⁹

Rapport between the photographer and the sitter comes with the photographer's own growth in life. It is tied in with the photographer's ability to penetrate below the surface of his subject through understanding and sympathy. Weston stated that if the photographer is to bring out the best in the sitter, he must recognize the rare moment when the face is unmasked to reveal the inner self--and to capture that moment without hesitation. This requires profound insight.⁵⁰

Photographic equipment and lighting arrangements are useless if the photographer cannot draw the right response from his subject. If he can obtain that response, the simplest photographic equipment will suffice. Weston's entire equipment, after thirty-five years of professional portraiture, consisted of a 4 x 5 Graflex, a tripod, and a background.⁵¹

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Weston, "Portrait Photography," VIII, 2938.

The photographer's primary purpose is to reveal his subject; though the subject must actually do the revealing, so the photographer can record it. The one thing that does the most to prevent this "self-revealing" process is self-consciousness, yet the studio and procedure of the average portrait photographer creates a great deal of self-consciousness. First of all, because of the studio atmosphere with its lights, reflectors, and false backgrounds. Secondly, through the suggested pose or expression that destroys naturalness. The pictures that result are lifeless, artificial, stereotyped masks rather than human beings who stand revealed.⁵²

Self-consciousness can be eliminated in the sitter if the photographer works in surroundings that will be as normal as possible to him. Whenever possible, the home of either the sitter or the photographer should be used for portrait photography. If the studio must be used, the equipment should be simplified to a minimum.⁵³

Many photographers who use artificial light use it because they have never taken the time and trouble to learn how to use daylight. Natural light is ideal for portraiture

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

since it avoids what is the chief cause of self-consciousness in portrait photography--artificial light. In natural light, the subject can be permitted greater freedom of movement without the danger that "lighting effects" will be spoiled. The photographer is not likely to succumb to a lighting formula. Work is not apt to become repetitious since each sitting provides the photographer with unique lighting conditions and a unique subject. Each particular problem in portraiture demands a fresh approach.⁵⁴

The photographer himself may be the cause of self-consciousness in the sitter. This can happen if the photographer asks the sitter to assume a pose or expression, or it can happen if the photographer is nervous or fumbles with the camera. Even asking a sitter to "hold it" may be fatal, since a frozen expression is no more desirable than a self-conscious one.⁵⁵

To avoid self-consciousness in the sitter, is only half the battle. The sitter must be revealed. With practice, the photographer will be able to draw forth and record the sitter's response. No two photographers will accomplish this in exactly the same way, but the requirements

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 2939.

remain the same. The photographer must learn to exercise a certain amount of control over his subject, without letting the subject become aware of it.⁵⁶

The average person is most himself when he is talking about something that interests him. Conversation provides the photographer with one of his handiest weapons. "One of the fine arts of portraiture," wrote Weston, "is to engage in conversation without missing a fleeting gesture or flicker of expression that may suit his purpose."⁵⁷ Weston believed that spontaneity in portraiture is vital. The honesty of the medium quickly betrays the photographer who approaches portraiture through spotlight diagrams and contrived poses. It is possible to achieve a technically excellent photograph in this manner, but it will lack in spontaneity and spontaneity can lead to the revealment of spirit.⁵⁸

In the final analysis, the portrait photographer's success or failure depends upon his ability to understand his fellow man. It is this understanding of human beings, plus the ability to make split-second judgments, to release a shutter on the right instant rather than the one just before or after, that makes a good portrait photographer.

⁵⁶ Weston, "Portrait Photography," VIII, 2940.

⁵⁷ Ibid. ⁵⁸ Ibid.

The photographer should observe people. He should not attempt to classify them by their likenesses or to see them as specific types, but it is valuable training to notice the differences in people and examine them keenly as individuals.⁵⁹

Concepts About the Camera

The same photographer, using a single camera, can achieve work that is so different in technique and conception that it would appear as though the work came from two different persons. Give the same camera and subject matter different photographers and the results will vary widely. The camera is only a means to an end. It can only see whatever the photographer sees.⁶⁰ The 8 x 10 inch view camera enables the photographer to see and study the image in its full size upon the ground glass. The ease of manipulation of the medium or small format camera allows the photographer more spontaneous results.⁶¹ Camera choice, therefore,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 228.

⁶¹ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 149; and Nancy Newhall, op. cit., p. 15.

depends upon the purpose of the photographer and the subject matter.

WESTON ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

Weston believed that the photographer's tools should be of second nature to him. The photographer should be able to see and think in terms of the focal length of his lenses, the effects of his filters, the emulsion of his film, and the scale of his paper.⁶² The photographer, in order to master his craft, should: (1) choose the simplest possible equipment so as to stay away from needless complications; (2) experimentally determine the potentialities and limitations of his equipment; (3) learn the field of his lenses; (4) learn the characteristics of his film and paper emulsions; (5) learn to judge the strength and quality of light; (6) learn to translate colors into their relative monochrome values and know how those values are affected by the use of different filters; (7) learn the kind of negative necessary to produce a given kind of print and then learn what kind of exposure and development will produce that negative; and (8) discover how to vary the process to get other kinds

⁶² Edward Weston, "What Is a Purist?," Camera Craft, XLVI, 1 (January, 1939), 4.

of prints.⁶³

Weston's Approach to Craftsmanship

Weston refused to use artificial light.⁶⁴ He apparently never printed by projection although bromide papers were available to him. He used a 3½ x 4½ Graflex for portraiture and an 8 x 10 view camera for all other subject matter.⁶⁵ He replaced his expensive soft-focus lens with an inexpensive but sharply cutting rapid rectilinear.⁶⁶

Weston simplified his working method to the point of virtuosity. He used one film and one paper. His negatives were developed with pyro-soda developer in a tray, and by inspection. His contact prints were made under an overhead bulb with a printing frame. Areas, beyond the scale of the paper, were carefully dodged. The prints were processed in Amidol developer and scrupulously fixed and washed. More than half of the first prints from his negatives were of exhibition quality. These prints were then drymounted on

⁶³ Edward Weston, "Photographic Art," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1946), XVII, 798.

⁶⁴ Statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Ansel Adams, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 22, 1966.

⁶⁵ Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946), p. 8.

⁶⁶ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 158.

white boards and spotted.⁶⁷

Weston had an almost intuitive feel for the technical aspects of exposure. He watched the subject and almost unconsciously compensated for any change of light. He did not like to calculate the exposure time, and found that his exposures were more accurate when they were only felt intuitively.⁶⁸

Weston and Glossy Paper

The reason that Weston used an 8 x 10 view camera and contact printed his negatives was that he was seeking the finest detail possible in his photographs.⁶⁹ Contact printing, represented for Weston, a means to achieve the greatest technical perfection possible from his negatives. No matter how well it is done, the enlargement does lose quality and cannot compare with a contact print made from the same negative.⁷⁰ It was this same desire for photographic beauty that led Weston to use glossy photographic paper. He discovered

⁶⁷ Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, Vol. I, The Daybooks of Edward Weston (New York Wittenborn & Company, 1961), p. 95.

⁶⁹ Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 324.

⁷⁰ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 242.

that glossy prints retained most of the original negative quality. Weston wanted the stark beauty that a lens can render without interference. On glossy paper, defects are expressed as well as weaknesses. Subterfuge becomes impossible. All reactions to the photograph must come directly from the original seeing of the subject. Paper surface and image color play no part; there is only rhythm, form, and perfect detail to consider.⁷¹

Weston felt that his negatives printed better on glossy paper because he was able to print much deeper than before with no fear of losing shadows, or muddying half tones by drying down. He was also able to use a more contrasty grade of paper, resulting in amazingly rich blacks yet retaining brilliant whites.⁷²

The glossy surface has the advantage of a longer tonal scale. This makes it possible to reproduce more of the negative and allows a greater latitude in reproducing extremes of tone. The strongest and deepest blacks to the most subtle and delicate grays or whites can be rendered. The image clarity and delicacy of gradation that

⁷¹Ibid., p. 147.

⁷²Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," Aperture, VI, 1 (1958), 25.

characterize a fine photograph are retained by a smooth surface and obscured by a dull, rough one.⁷³

In black-and-white photography, the effect of warmth or coldness should be communicated by the values in the print. The use of obvious color-tone belongs in the province of color photography. The longer scale of glossy paper gives the photographer a greater opportunity of producing whatever effects he desires through the values in the print.⁷⁴

The luminous surface of the glossy paper, by making the image appear to give light, comes nearest to rendering the effect of the original scene and heightens the illusion of reality.⁷⁵ Weston wrote:

. . . Besides giving me all possible quality from a given negative, glossy paper deprives me of a chance to spot--repair--a print from a damaged or carelessly seen negative. Everything is revealed--retouching on the negative or spotting on the print. One is faced with the real issue, significant presentation of the Thing Itself without photographic quality.⁷⁶

Weston admired the sharp, long scale, glossy photograph but he didn't know how he might feel in the future.

⁷³Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

⁷⁴Ibid. ⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," VI, 25.

He once expressed the idea that he might someday throw his "fans" into utter confusion by making a series of soft-focus negatives, just to contradict himself and show that it could be done.⁷⁷

Craftsmanship and the Living Element

Weston disagreed with the argument that glossy prints are harsh, cold, and only suitable for commercial work.⁷⁸ The glossy print, and all of the other techniques that became a part of Weston's style, were the results of many years of experience. They were selected by Weston because they were in harmony with his philosophies about photography, and because they allowed him to place emphasis entirely on vision.⁷⁹

Weston deliberately stripped his technique, his manner of living, and his seeing of unessentials. He tried to make technical considerations entirely subordinate to his pictorial aims.⁸⁰ He felt that his technique was never quite equal to his vision, but he believed that this was preferable

⁷⁷ Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," Aperture, XII, 1 & 2 (1965), 76.

⁷⁸ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

⁷⁹ Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Weston, loc. cit.

to having technique superior to creative vision.⁸¹ He photographed what he wanted to photograph. Print quality, image quality, the format, the developer, and the camera were all tied into his expression. When he came across a certain aspect of the world in which he could achieve a resonance within that structure of his equipment and viewpoint, he made a picture.⁸² In the course of time, Weston's technique and aesthetic aims became one. He once wrote:

. . . I have reprinted several old negatives, especially of clouds. The results are far ahead of my printing of a year ago. Perhaps it is not so much a finer technique as it is a surer feeling for that which I wish to say aesthetically.⁸³

If he could not pull a technically fine print from a technically fine negative, the emotional or intellectual value of the photograph was lost for him.⁸⁴ He destroyed photographic negatives that failed to satisfy him. On one occasion, he destroyed negatives which would have been excellent in a different light. The light changed while

⁸¹ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, I, 147.

⁸² Ira Latour, "West Coast Photography--Does It Really Exist?," Photography, XII, 6 (June, 1957), 62.

⁸³ Nancy Newhall, loc. cit.

⁸⁴ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 124.

Weston was photographing cacti, and although he knew this at the time, the desire to work overpowered his judgment.⁸⁵

If the photographer does not understand and control his instruments and processes, it is not possible for him to produce consistently good technical work. By mastering his craft, the photographer frees himself to work creatively because he no longer has to consider each specific mechanical function that he performs.⁸⁶

The many technical controls that the photographer has at his disposal can act as a barrier to creative expression. Few photographers ever master their medium because they never stay with one piece of equipment long enough to learn its full capacities. Instead they allow the medium to master them because they chase after the latest papers, developers, lenses, and gadgets.

. . . Only long experience will enable the photographer to subordinate technical considerations to pictorial aims, but the task can be made immeasurably easier by selecting the simplest possible equipment and procedures and staying with them. Learning to see in terms of the field of one lens, the scale of one film and one paper, will accomplish a good deal more

⁸⁵ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 270.

⁸⁶ Edward Weston, "Portrait Photography," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), VIII, 2937.

than gathering a smattering of knowledge about several different sets of tools.⁸⁷

There is no "perfect negative" or "right exposure." The photographer must learn what kind of a negative is necessary to produce the kind of print that he wants, and then the kind of exposure and development necessary to produce that negative.⁸⁸

After the photographer learns how to produce one kind of a print, he must learn how to vary the process in order to produce other kinds of prints. The requirements of craftsmanship are mastered slowly and over a period of time. With practice, this kind of knowledge becomes intuitive; the photographer learns to see a scene or object in terms of his finished print without having to give conscious thoughts to the steps that will be necessary to carry out his aesthetic aims.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 162.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), IX, 3204.

STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

Each medium of expression imposes its own limitations on the creative artist. These limitations are inherent in the tools, materials, or process that the artist employs. The artist should select a particular medium because it will best express what he has to say.⁹⁰

The photographer, in order to master his tools and perfect his technique, must devote just as much time and effort to photography as the painter does to art or the musician does to music. Since the nature of the photographic process determines the artist's approach, the photographer must have some knowledge of the inherent characteristics of the medium in order to understand the aesthetic basis of photographic art.⁹¹

The Unique Qualities of the Photographic Medium

The camera and the human eye do not see alike. The camera captures and fixes forever a single, isolated condition of the moment. Our vision is in a constant state of

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 3200.

⁹¹Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 797.

change.⁹² The ability of the camera to record things as the eye can never see is one of the most important attributes of photography. The human eye can focus on but one small area at a time. It roves over the scene in a series of small jumps. The brain sorts and edits the images. Some are discarded as of no importance; others are emphasized, according to its individual conditioning. The impersonal camera lens makes no such distinction; every detail within its field of vision can be recorded instantly and with clarity.⁹³

The eye reports an impression; the camera reports its subject completely. In photography, we use lenses of various focal lengths to purposely exaggerate what we actually see. We "over-correct" color for the same reason. In printing, we distort still further, by using papers to intensify the contrast of the original object or scene. This is legitimate but it is not literal seeing. It is seeing with intention and with a reason.⁹⁴ It is seeing done with creative imagination.

Photography can go beyond unqualified realism. The

⁹² Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," XII, 42.

⁹³ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 797.

⁹⁴ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 240.

photographer is not confined to factual recording. Actually, nature cannot be copied exactly. The photographer can record approximate tone values, but these may not be aesthetically correct. On the other hand, any manual interference with the image instantly destroys those very qualities that give the true photograph value as an art form. The nature of the image is such that it cannot survive corrective handwork.⁹⁵

Weston wrote that there are three inherent capacities of photography: (1) the rapidity of the recording process, (2) the ability to register more than the eye can see, and (3) the ability to present an unbroken sequence of infinitely subtle gradations.⁹⁶

The capacity of the medium to record very quickly permits the photographer to previsualize his finished print on the ground glass. He can record the subject at the moment of deepest perception, and isolate the moment when the subject stands clearly revealed.⁹⁷

The camera enlarges human vision by revealing the world in new terms and new dimensions. By developing an

⁹⁵ Weston, loc. cit.

⁹⁶ Edward Weston, "What Is Photographic Beauty?," American Photography, XLV, 12 (December, 1951), 740.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

exacting control over his medium, the photographer can take advantage of photography's penetrating seeing power. He must learn to distinguish important detail from meaningless detail, and must guide his camera accordingly.⁹⁸

Photography is basically an honest medium. Any manual interference with the image instantly destroys those very qualities that give the true photograph value as an art form.

. . . The photographer's power lies in his ability to recreate his subject in terms of its basic reality and to present this re-creation in such a form that the spectator feels that he is seeing not just a symbol for the object but the thing itself revealed for the first time.
 . . .⁹⁹

The quality of authenticity is one of the most powerful and appealing qualities possible in a photograph. The camera can produce a heightened sense of reality--a kind of super realism that reveals the essence of things. The photographer may see and recognize this super realism, but he must also transfer his vision to the finished print. Gradation is a means of retaining and intensifying the quality of super realism. The photographer, therefore, should choose a paper with the longest possible scale.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 742.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 743.

Photography is too direct and uncompromising a medium to allow subterfuge. Gestures and poses that look contrived, and artificial fog or moonlight effects, are not easily concealed.¹⁰¹ No after consideration such as retouching, enlarging a portion of the negative, or changing tonal values can make up for a negative exposed without previsualization at the time of exposure.¹⁰²

There are a great many controls open to the photographer that are in keeping with the nature of the medium. He can vary the position of the camera, the camera angle, or the focal length of the lens. By completely altering the viewpoint of perspective, the photographer changes or distorts nature at will.¹⁰³ Tonal values can be changed depending upon the light that falls on the subject, the selection of film that the photographer makes, or the use of a color filter.¹⁰⁴ Relative values in the negative can be controlled by length of exposure, the kind of emulsion

¹⁰¹ Edward Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 156.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 797; and Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 229.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

used, and the method of developing.¹⁰⁵ The photographer can further modify values in the negative through printing controls, and there is a wide choice of paper surface textures, and grades of contrast, to shorten, lengthen or render exactly the scale of gradation in the original scene.¹⁰⁶

Straight Photography and the Purist Approach

Every medium has its own unique characteristics as well as its limitations. If the creative artist chooses to work in the photographic medium and then fails to take advantage of those special characteristics, he will do no creative work.¹⁰⁷ Photography's most important features, the mechanical camera and indiscriminate lens-eye, by preventing too personal an interpretation of the subject, direct the photographer to reveal the world objectively and impersonally.¹⁰⁸

In Weston's view, there have been few historically important photographers and comparatively little work

¹⁰⁵ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 797.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Weston, "What Is Photographic Beauty?," XLV, 250.

¹⁰⁸ Ansel Adams, Making a Photograph (New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1939), p. 11.

produced in this medium worthy of the name of art. Most photographers fail to use the medium creatively because they are unable to use and recognize the basic resources of the medium. They either have misconceptions about the medium or find it difficult to acquire a technique that is adequate to carry out their aesthetic purpose.¹⁰⁹

Photography is a comparatively new art form that is essentially different from all the other graphic processes. Photographs cannot be judged on the basis of their resemblance to paintings and drawings. Since photography has its own unique potentialities and limitations, it requires a new standard of criticism based on the principles and properties of the photographic process.¹¹⁰

The photographer can depart from literal recording to whatever extent he chooses, without resorting to methods of control that are not photographic. Photographic beauty is an end to be attained only by photographic means. Photography should not be used to create a work in which it is

¹⁰⁹ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 796; and Edward Weston, "A Contemporary Means to Creative Expression," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 158.

¹¹⁰ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 796.

apparent that a clearer communication might have been established in other ways.¹¹¹

The photo-secessionists considered soft-focus lenses and various flexible printing processes as valid means of control for the photographer. They contested that all manual interference with the camera's image is unphotographic. The Photo-Secessionists continued to follow the painter's tradition, but they used photographic means in order to achieve those results. For this reason, they made the first important step toward a recognition of the medium's limitations.¹¹²

In the years following the Photo-Secession, the reaction against the photo-painting technique was carried to extremes. Photographers interested in the technical side of the medium carried "purism" to such lengths as to maintain that no control of any sort should be exercised by the photographer. They maintained that even the "spotting" of dust specks and scratches on the negative or print was a violation of the medium.¹¹³

¹¹¹Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), IX, 3203; and Weston, "A Contemporary Means to Creative Expression," pp. 158-59.

¹¹²Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 797.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

Weston defined the use of the terms pictorialist and purist, but actually no two such clear-cut groups ever existed.

. . . If a photographer belonged to the first group, he was supposed to work up his negative by hand and always strive to make his resulting print look like a drawing, etching, etc., while a member of the purist group was supposed to make sharp prints on glossy paper using no control except in choosing his subject matter and camera angle. . . .¹¹⁴

Some pictorialists used purely photographic methods; many so-called purists controlled all of their procedures, but not by manual means. A great deal of misunderstanding was fostered because both sides failed to clearly define the terms they used, and because many photographers mistake means for ends and consider the method of production more important than the product itself.¹¹⁵

The Photo-Painter may seem to be a photographer, but he really is not. Even if he made a perfect negative, he would not be able to leave it alone.¹¹⁶ Weston called those who tried to make their prints look like etchings, drawings, or paintings "Photo-Painters" instead of photographers. For the photographer, or Purist, there is no substitute for

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Edward Weston, "What Is a Purist?," Camera Craft, XLVI, 1 (January, 1939), 9.

photographic beauty. Handiwork which hides or destroys this beauty is considered to be a violation of the medium. The Purist strives for the "perfect negative," that is, negatives that contain everything he wants in his prints. He perfects his technique so that he may better express what he has to say.¹¹⁷

The Purist works out all camera problems before the exposure is made. Processing and finishing are purely mechanical operations aimed at preserving the maximum gradation and tonal separation. The ideal print, for the Purist, is an uncontrolled glossy because this gives maximum separation between black-and white. The Purist does not believe in altering tonal values. He prints the negative, as is, on glossy paper. Retouching is forbidden. Sector analysis and good taste are the extent to which the Purist allows the principles of composition in the other arts to affect his photography.¹¹⁸

Many photographers believe that composition has no relation to a specific medium. Composition, they feel, consists of a set of tested rules and conventions. In the photographic medium, to compose a subject well means to see

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

and present it in the strongest manner possible.¹¹⁹ Weston believed that the painter and the photographer must approach composition differently, because of basic differences between the two mediums:

. . . Its capacity for rendering fine detail and tone makes photography excel in recording form and texture. Its subtlety of gradation makes it admirably suited to recording qualities of light or shadow, and its ability to record sharply everything within the angle of lens-vision from the immediate foreground to the distant horizon carries it far beyond the painter's province. The photographer cannot depend on rules deduced from finished work in another medium. He must learn to see things through his own eyes and his own camera; only then can he present his subject in a way that will transmit his feeling for it to others.

An intuitive knowledge of composition in terms of the capacities of his process, enables the photographer to record his subject at the moment of deepest perception; to capture the fleeting instant when the light on a landscape, the form of a cloud, the gesture of a hand or the expression of a face, momentarily presents a profound revelation of life. . . .¹²⁰

The early photographers emulated the painters because they had no tradition to guide them. They believed that photography was a new kind of painting, and they attempted to make the camera produce painter-like results. The photo-painter's approach to photography, through allegorical costume pieces and blur, was at odds with the real

¹¹⁹ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 799.

nature of the medium. Each improvement in the photographic process became just one more obstacle for the photo-painter to overcome.¹²¹

The influence of the painter's tradition delayed recognition of much of the real creative work that was going on in photography. As a result, the best work of the past comes from: (1) commercial portraits of the daguerreotype era, (2) the Civil War, (3) documents of the American frontier, and (4) the work of amateurs and professionals who practiced photography without worrying whether or not it was art.¹²²

In Weston's time, the photo-painter relied on the painter's tradition through the use of texture screens, handwork on negatives, and ready-made rules of composition. It was believed that the product of a machine could not be art. Special techniques were developed to combat the mechanical nature of the photographic process, and the negative became a point of departure for the imagination of the photo-painter.¹²³

The approach of the photo-painter is not logical in

¹²¹ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), IX, 3200.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 3201-02.

photography. The photographic process is different from the other graphic arts because of the nature of the recording process, and the nature of the image.¹²⁴ The photographic image is amazingly precise in its definition, especially in the recording of fine detail. It can render the subtlest gradations from black to white. "These two characteristics," wrote Weston, "constitute the trademark of the photograph; they pertain to the mechanics of the process and cannot be duplicated by any work of the human hand."¹²⁵

The photographic image is more like a mosaic than a drawing or painting. It is made up of tiny particles rather than lines. The extreme fineness of these particles gives a special tension to the image. When that tension is destroyed, either by the intrusion of handwork, by too great enlargement, or by printing on a rough surface, the integrity of the photograph is destroyed.¹²⁶

The tone of the photographic image is inherently lucid and brilliant. These qualities cannot be retained on dull surface print papers. Only a smooth, light-giving surface can reproduce satisfactorily the brilliant clarity of the photographic image.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 3202. ¹²⁵ Ibid. ¹²⁶ Ibid. ¹²⁷ Ibid.

Some photographers use variations of image color, for example, cold blue-black as opposed to warm green-black to emphasize the feeling of the picture. This is a misuse of the medium because it introduces a foreign element into the monochromatic process just as surely as coloring the print by hand.¹²⁸

The honesty of the photographic medium can hardly be considered a limitation. It makes no difference if the contrived, the trivial, and the artificial are exposed for what they are. The only subject matter that is barred from the photographer is the kind that properly belongs to the painter. The camera can look deeply into the nature of things, and present the subject in terms of its basic reality. The photographer can reveal the very essence of what lies before his lens with such clear insight that the viewer may find the recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual object.¹²⁹

Some of Weston's descriptions of his work illustrate what a potentially powerful and vital medium of expression photography can be:

¹²⁸ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

¹²⁹ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), IX, 3205.

. . . The print of the Big Sur is not important: a thing of emotional mood, rather than a revelation of essentials. A painter could have done it better. Made against the light, all detail, surface texture is absent--that important asset of photography. In comparison there is my negative of the juniper tree detail: it has exciting rhythms plus exquisite detail which no painter could record,--or if attempted must appear niggling, while in the photograph--an exact transcript of Nature and therefore exactly true--it is honest, convincing.

I also printed a nude, which in contrast makes the cliffs pale: the latter visually tremendous as seen in reality,--the former transformed by my way of seeing and understanding into something greater. . . .¹³⁰

Weston concluded that the photographer cannot equal the work of a fine painter, aesthetically or emotionally, when both are seeking to achieve the same end result--that is, the painter's viewpoint. Nor can the painter equal the photographer in his particular field.¹³¹

PREVISUALIZATION

The photographic medium requires the greatest accuracy, and surest judgment. The painter can change his

¹³⁰ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, Vol. II, The Daybooks of Edward Weston (New York: Horizon Press, 1966), p. 111.

¹³¹ Edward Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An Anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 155.

original conception as he works. It is not necessary for every detail to be conceived in advance. It is different in photography. The photographer must see minute detail which can never be changed. A moment of time must be captured without hesitation.¹³²

The finished print must be created in full before the exposure is made, and the medium's capabilities must be used, not as correctives, but as predetermined means of carrying out that original visualization.¹³³

The Justification for Previsualization

Weston reasoned that because the photographic process is instantaneous, and the image cannot survive corrective handwork, the finished print must be visualized before the film is exposed. If the photographer is to exercise control over his work, he must learn to visualize his final result in advance, and to predetermine the procedures necessary to carry out that visualization.¹³⁴ After considerations, such as enlarging portions of a negative, changing values, or

¹³² Ibid., p. 157.

¹³³ Edward Weston, "Photographic Art," Encyclopaedia Britannica (1946), XVII, 797.

¹³⁴ Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), IX, 3202.

retouching cannot make up for a negative exposed without a complete realization at the time of exposure.¹³⁵ All values, all textures, and exact dimensions should be fully considered before the time of exposure, for with the release of the shutter the image becomes unalterably fixed. The original concept of the photographer is completed once the negative is developed and the final print has been made.¹³⁶

The Nature of Previsualization

In photography, thought and action so nearly coincide that the conception of an idea and its execution can be almost simultaneous. "The previsioned image," Weston wrote, "as seen through the camera, is perpetuated at the moment of clearest understanding, or most intense emotional response. . . ."¹³⁷ Gradually, as a photographer gains experience, the problems of craftsmanship become intuitive. The experienced photographer can visualize the

¹³⁵ Edward Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 156.

¹³⁶ Ansel Adams, Making a Photograph (New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1939), p. 12.

¹³⁷ Edward Weston, Photography, ed. Carl Thurston, Enjoy Your Museum Series, Vol. IIC (Pasadena, California: Esto Publishing Company, 1934), p. 5.

subject, in terms of his finished print, without having to think of the processes that are involved.¹³⁸

Previsualization and Weston's Approach

Beaumont Newhall, in his book, The History of Photography, wrote: "The most important part of Edward Weston's approach was his insistence that the photographer should previsualize the final print before making the exposure."¹³⁹ Weston didn't want to leave anything to chance. He willfully isolated the subject, and deliberately selected his lens, film, paper, and chemicals, to complete a photographic image that was visualized before he exposed. When Weston looked at the ground glass, before exposure, he wanted to see and know how his finished print would look.¹⁴⁰ The photographer, he believed, must previsualize and feel the finished print before exposure. He wrote: ". . . There is no substitute for amazement felt and significance realized, at the time of exposure. Development and printing become but

¹³⁸ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

¹³⁹ Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 158.

¹⁴⁰ Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 262.

a careful carrying out of the original conception. . . ."¹⁴¹
 Weston attached so much importance to the concept of pre-
 visualization, that cropping or trimming the final print was
 considered an admission of failure to see in a creative
 way.¹⁴²

Previsualization and the Photographer

Before the photographer can previsualize the finished print, he must learn to see in terms of his tools and processes. He must know just what kind of negative he wants, how he will process it, and what kind of print he will make from it. Every step which will be taken from the time of exposure until the print is made should be predetermined. The photographer must know exactly what he is doing before he can see his finished print on the ground glass.¹⁴³ It is difficult to see the finished print on the ground glass, to mentally carry that image on through the various processes of finishing to a final result, and to be reasonably

¹⁴¹Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1946, p. 8.

¹⁴²Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1949), p. 159

¹⁴³Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798; and Edward Weston, "What Is a Purist?," Camera Craft, XLVI, 1 (January, 1939), 4.

certain that the result will be exactly what was originally seen and felt.¹⁴⁴

THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND IN PHOTOGRAPHY

If Weston's imagery came from the subconscious mind, it was not the result of repressions or inhibitions. He lived an uninhibited life. It was because his work had a quality about it that takes one beyond the world of the conscious mind.

A pepper becomes more than a pepper in a Weston photograph. It has no psychological attributes, it arouses no human emotions, yet, it becomes abstract in the sense that the photograph goes completely beyond the realm of the subject matter itself. The inner reality of the subject matter is mystically revealed with a clear understanding. The photographer becomes a visionary because the subject is presented through the intuitive self rather than through the intellectual self.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," p. 157.

¹⁴⁵ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 224.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT

Weston's Response to Subject Matter

The critical test of a photographer does not lie in what he photographs; it is how he approaches the subject, the way it is seen and recorded that matters. The subject matter is immaterial. A lens sees too clearly to be used for recording the superficial aspects of a subject. The camera exposes the contrived, the trivial, and the artificial for what they really are. For example, the carefully posed and costumed figures photographed in allegorical situations by O. G. Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson appear absurd and unreal. Their work appears self-conscious and stilted.¹⁴⁶

There are as many ways to see as there are individuals. Although the photographer is restricted to representing objects of the real world, he has a great deal of choice in how he portrays those objects. He can depart from a literal rendering of the subject to whatever extent that he chooses, and still not resort to any method of control that is not of a photographic nature.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 121; and Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

¹⁴⁷ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 797.

There is no use to exactly copy nature. It cannot be physically improved upon. Fine artists don't attempt to copy nature. When they do paint nature literally, the presentation arouses connotations quite apart from the subject matter. The camera can be used to convey an abstract idea when it records nature in this manner.

. . . To find a dead pelican, photograph a few inches of its wing, so that white quills dart from black barbs like rays of light cutting a night sky, --this is not copying Nature, but using her with imaginative intent to a definite end.¹⁴⁸

The creative artist must rise above literal reality, yet his work must remain sensuous. Weston paid a great deal of attention to the form of what he photographed. Whether it was a pepper, some strange cloud, or an orchard in southern California, Weston played up the formal elements. Nature was something in which he could find that certain organization of form which delighted him.¹⁴⁹ He went directly to nature to select forms that sculptors like Brancusi had to "create." He saw sculpture in growing forms, and vegetables such as eggplant, peppers, and artichokes became vital to

¹⁴⁸ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 219.

¹⁴⁹ Statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Ansel Adams, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 22, 1966.

Weston's artistic life.¹⁵⁰ Weston wrote that the extreme abstractions of Brancusi were all based upon natural forms. He admitted admiring Brancusi and wrote that he may have been inspired by Brancusi's work.¹⁵¹ Weston believed that nature has all the abstract or simplified forms that Brancusi or any other artist could imagine. But, with his camera, Weston went directly to Brancusi's source. What Brancusi had to "create," Weston found ready to see, select, and isolate.¹⁵²

Photography has a tremendous capacity for revealing new things in new ways, but each picture must be attacked as a fresh problem. "My greatest danger," wrote Weston, "is in imitating myself--not others." He avoided compositions that were reminiscent of things that he had done before. It tired him to use the same approach often but sometimes in using another viewpoint he failed to convince. He wanted spontaneity in his photographs, and believed that the way to work is to see and photograph without hesitation.¹⁵³ Composition or form is vital in photography. It is the

¹⁵⁰ Pollack, loc. cit.

¹⁵¹ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 240.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 36, 270.

most forceful way that the photographer can communicate his experience and it will vary according to the special qualities or significance of the thing to be presented. It is not a formula to be learned by rule.¹⁵⁴

Weston felt in the object, all the mystery of its life force. He was amazed and emotionally stirred. By his way of presentation, by his recognition of the reason for the object's form and its significance in relation to all forms, he was able to communicate his experience to others.¹⁵⁵

He wrote in his Daybooks that he only indicated the likeness of bones or kelp, or anything else, to other forms in nature, to show the relativity of everything. He never photographed things because of their similarity to other objects. Weston did not look for symbolic meanings or literal associations of form. He never saw these associated forms when he worked. He saw parts of life as symbols of all life.¹⁵⁶

Weston was very sensitive to the form of objects. He realized that when he felt the form of the subject deeply, he would make good negatives. Through his writings, Weston indicated that he was aware of the connotations of meaning

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 222. ¹⁵⁵ Ibid. ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 141, 185.

That form can convey. He wrote this about the squashes he was photographing:

. . . They are really gorgeous: one exquisite as a Brancusi, another a human embryo,--another wartlike, malignant,--a little round one, quite jolly. I found also a cabbage of unusual shape, the leaves folded to a definite point: it is a beauty.¹⁵⁷

One negative, a detail of a tree trunk, was said to have the feeling of a strangely beautiful torso.

Weston, on occasion, used the expression, "to make a pepper more than a pepper." He did not mean "different" from a pepper, but a pepper that became a revelation through an intensification of its own important form and texture.¹⁵⁸

Weston summed up his approach to the medium in these words:

. . . I do not know any formal rules of composition, nor do I recognize any boundaries to subject matter. Subject matter is everywhere: it may be an old shoe, a cloud, or my own backyard. Whatever it is, its inherent qualities supply the rules of composition for that particular subject, within the scope of the medium.

I do not attempt to copy nature or present factual records. I depart from literal rendering to whatever extent is necessary for the presentation of my response to the subject. I control each step of the photographic

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 37, 43.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 54, 240.

process in order to carry out accurately my original vision.¹⁵⁹

Photography of an Inner State of Mind

The artist is the interpreter of the inexpressible; for the layman he is the link between the known and the unknown. This is mysticism, but there is no other way to explain our intense response to forms that are not related to the world we know. Granted the eye becomes excited, but why? The Weston Daybooks are his attempts to analyze and to understand the strange, unexplainable flashes of vision that came through his camera.¹⁶⁰

The camera's innate honesty makes it well fitted for searching deeply into the meaning of things. The discriminating photographer can reveal the essence of the subject with such clear insight that the beholder will find the recreated image more real and comprehensible than the actual object. The lens does not reveal a subject significantly of its own accord. Its vision is completely impartial and indiscriminating. It makes no distinction between important

¹⁵⁹ Ralph Samuels, "Edward Weston Photographer," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels (New York: Falk Publishing Company, 1951), pp. 39-40.

¹⁶⁰ Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," Aperture, XII, 1 & 2 (1965), 6.

detail and meaningless detail. But, if the photographer understands his subject, and has mastered his process, the photograph can isolate and perpetuate an important and revealing moment of time.¹⁶¹

A photograph may approximate reality, but it can never attain unqualified realism. The camera does not reproduce nature exactly as we see it. By contrast, an extreme departure from factual recording is possible and relevant to "straight" photography.¹⁶²

Weston was not prepared to say which approach was the better one. He held the belief that it was more important to render reality and capture life's fleeting moments, since no other medium can possibly picture life so well. At times, however, his tendency was to work entirely towards the abstract. This may have indicated a more introspective state of being, and a deeper intellectual consideration of subject matter.¹⁶³ Weston wanted to reveal the essence, or

¹⁶¹ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

¹⁶² Edward Weston, "A Contemporary Means to Creative Expression," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 158.

¹⁶³ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston,

mystery of things, more clearly than the layman's eye can see. He knew that photographs can penetrate beneath the level of the surface in order to express feelings that we supply from within ourselves. He did not understand why.¹⁶⁴

The Essence of the Subject vs. the Projection of
the Photographer

The camera is best used for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the subject, regardless of what that subject is. The emotional intensity which Weston achieved in his Mexican portraits of the 1920's could not have been done as well in any other medium. Weston wrote: "I shall let no chance pass to record interesting abstractions but I feel definite in my belief that the approach to photography--and its most difficult approach--is through realism."¹⁶⁵

Weston did not wish to impose his personality upon nature. He approached nature in a spirit of inquiry or

Mexico, Vol. I, The Daybooks of Edward Weston (New York: Wittenborn & Company, 1961), p. 136.

¹⁶⁴ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 220; and Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, I, 91.

¹⁶⁵ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, I, 55.

communion. He wanted to learn from nature, and believed that the injection of his personality would weaken anything that he might wish to express in his work. Self expression usually produces distortion because it is often based upon biased opinion. Any divergence from nature, therefore, must be toward a clearer understanding of the essential qualities in things. These qualities may be intentionally emphasized by the photographer. Weston, in his photography, wished to present the significance of facts in a form that the spectator might understand.¹⁶⁶

Weston was not interested in photographing moods, or transitory lighting effects. He wished to render the physical quality of things with the utmost exactness: stone is hard, bark is rough, flesh is alive, or they can be made harder, rougher, or more alive if desired. He often worked for days on a single form in various nuances of natural light. He was after an objective presentation of the texture, rhythm, and form in nature--the quintessence of the object, rather than an interpretation, or passing mood.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 241.

¹⁶⁷ Edward Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood

In 1930, Weston wrote:

. . . These painters, most painters, and the photographers who imitate them, are "expressing themselves": "Art" is considered as a self-expression." I am no longer trying to "express myself," to impose my own personality on nature, but without prejudice, without falsification, to become identified with nature, to see or know things as they are, their very essence, so that what I record is not an interpretation--my idea of what nature should be--but a revelation, a piercing of the smoke screen artificially cast over life by neurosis, into an absolute, impersonal recognition. Art is weakened in degree, according to the amount of personality expressed: to be explicit according to the warping and twisting of knowledge by inhibitions. . . .¹⁶⁸

If Weston photographed a rock, he wanted it to look like a rock, but to be more than a rock. This is significant presentation--not interpretation. He wished to strip bare, with his camera, the life force within the form--whatever might be the form--when he was granted the flash of revelation.¹⁶⁹

Weston liked to organize and present his subject matter as it was found in nature. He liked to work without

Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 155; and Nancy Newhall, Edward Weston, p. 8; and Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 79.

¹⁶⁸ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 221.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. ix, 154.

manual arrangement, and to make his selection by means of his viewpoint as seen through the camera. He got a greater joy from finding things in Nature, already composed, than from his finest personal arrangements. "After all," he wrote, "selection is another way of arranging: to move the camera an eighth of an inch is quite as subtle as moving likewise a pepper. Subjects that are too well posed, too cleverly rendered, or artificial in their appearance, do not lend themselves to good photography."¹⁷⁰

Weston approached his subject matter with a mind that was sensitive, but free from pre-conceptions. He never tried to plan in advance. His eyes made only a preliminary search because he realized the camera's eye might change his original idea or even switch him to different subject matter. The subject was re-discovered through the lens. Weston saw the final form of presentation on the ground glass. The finished print, complete in every detail, was pre-visioned before exposure. His conception, once it was finally fixed by the release of the shutter, was duplicated in the print.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 146, 149-50.

¹⁷¹ Weston, "Photography--Not Pictorial," p. 155; and Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 154.

Chance or Happenstance

Weston realized that chance plays a significant role in photography, as it does in all branches of art. It determines what subject matter will be photographed, as well as how effective the transformation from reality to photograph will be.¹⁷²

The creative artist should be ready to take advantage of chance because, in reality, chance means to be attuned to one's surroundings. Weston found ready-made "arrangements" everywhere; but this is not surprising if we consider that: a chance word or phrase starts a trend of thought in a writer, and a chance combination of lines can bring forth a new composition from the painter.¹⁷³

The camera is a valuable way of recording passing moments if the photographer is ready at the time. No other medium can equal photography in spontaneity. Photography can completely capture the first fresh emotion, or feeling for the subject, at the very moment it is seen and felt.

¹⁷² Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 10: and Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 262.

¹⁷³ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 155.

Feeling and recording are simultaneous. That is why pure photography has the great vitality which manipulated photography can never have.¹⁷⁴

This does not mean that the photographer must wait for a picture, if the lighting or subject matter are not the way that he would like them to be. Weston never waited for a picture. He put up his camera and went on, knowing that he was likely to find three subjects just as good within the hour. The simplified forms, found in Weston's nudes, were not so easily found. There was that element of chance as to whether or not the body might assume an important movement, or if the breathing would spoil a line.¹⁷⁵

RESPONSES TO PHOTOGRAPHS

Weston defined self-expression as an illusion in which the artist imagines that he can conceive of and create non-existent forms. "On the contrary," wrote Weston, "the most 'abstract' art is derived from forms in nature." When these are interpreted with biased opinion, or meanings are read into them, the resulting conclusions are filled with

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 10, 155; and Pollack, The Picture History of Photography, p. 266.

meaningless distortion. A work of art may be said to say more or less than it actually does.¹⁷⁶

The Effect of Artistic Vision and Craft

The value of the photograph as a work of art depends primarily on the photographer's vision before the exposure was made, but if exposure records the photographer's seeing; developing and printing execute it. Therefore, no matter how fine the original vision of the photographer might be, it must be faithfully carried out in the subsequent procedures or the resulting print will suffer. A photograph's artistic value can only be determined by an examination of the finished print.¹⁷⁷

Authenticity Appeals to Our Emotions

The main reason that a photograph appeals so strongly to our emotions is due to the quality of authenticity. We, as spectators, accept the authority of a photograph because we believe that we would have seen that scene or object exactly so if we had been there. Weston pointed out that the human eye is incapable of this. First of all, the

¹⁷⁶ Weston, "A Contemporary Means to Creative Expression," p. 158.

¹⁷⁷ Weston, "Photographic Art," XVII, 798.

photographer does not reproduce a scene exactly. Secondly, it is doubtful that we could identify the original scene from having seen the photograph. Yet, it is this belief in the reality of a photograph that calls up a strong response in the spectator and enables him to participate in the artist's experience.¹⁷⁸ The spectator can only respond and participate in the original experience to the extent that the completed work: realizes a depth of understanding about the subject matter, and presents the subject with uniqueness and vitality.¹⁷⁹

Responses to Weston's Photography

Weston expressed the belief that it doesn't make any difference what subject matter is used to communicate a feeling toward life. Shells, bodies, and clouds are contemporary subject matter, but they can portray universal feelings.¹⁸⁰

The photographer should allow his photographs to "speak" for themselves, since it is possible for the photographer to weaken his work by trying to read into each

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 799.

¹⁷⁹ Weston, "A Contemporary Means to Creative Expression," p. 158.

¹⁸⁰ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 24.

photograph its esoteric derivation. People will only get from a photograph what they bring to it.¹⁸¹

The shell photographs of Weston were called mystical, erotic, and sensuous. They were said to contain both the innocence of natural things and the morbidity of the sophisticated, distorted mind. Tina Modotti wrote:

. . . Since the creation of an artist is the result of his state of mind and soul at the time of creation, these last photographs of your clearly show that you are leaning toward mysticism. . . . At the same time they are sensuous.¹⁸²

The Mexican artists, Diego Rivera and Orozco, were affected on the physical side by the photographs. Weston found this difficult to understand. He did not have any physical reaction while working with the shells, nor was he attempting to record erotic symbolism. The shell has a sensuous quality which is combined with a deep spiritual significance. Weston believed it is this combination of the physical and spiritual in a shell, which can make it such an important abstract of life. Weston had a clear vision of the aesthetic form of shells. He knew that he was recording

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 6; and Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," Aperture, XII, 1 & 2 (1965), 22.

¹⁸² Nancy Newhall, "Edward Weston: Photographer," XII, 1 & 2 (1965), 21-22.

his inner feelings toward life, but it was not until the negatives were actually developed that he realized what he had felt--for when he worked, he was unconscious of what he was doing.¹⁸³

Some saw phallic symbolism in Weston's photography, but Weston himself denied it. "There could not be phallic symbolism where none was intended or felt," he said. Weston did not premeditate symbolism of any kind. He did not feel that direct symbolism ever goes into the work of a really important artist. If symbolism exists in Weston's work, it is because he saw parts and fragments as universal symbols. He understood the relativity of all things, and the resemblance of natural forms to each other.¹⁸⁴

The New York artist, Edward Biberman, had a logical and possible solution to the question of why some people see phallic symbolism in Weston's work. He said, in effect, that Weston saw vegetables and other natural or fundamental forms with such direct honesty and intensity, that a tremendous force like sex, which permeates all nature, could not help but be revealed. All basic forms are so closely related

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 224.

as to be visually equivalent, according to Biberman.¹⁸⁵

Weston saw parts of life in relation to the whole. Their essence was recorded with a simplification which Weston liked to call an "abstraction." The literal-minded person immediately begins to find what a thing resembles, and so a back may be taken for a pear. Knees may be taken for shell forms, and rocks can be taken for almost anything imaginable. The creative artist is aware of universal spiritual connotations in his work, but he is never concerned with literary allusions.¹⁸⁶

The radical writer and painter, Alfaro Siqueiros, wrote a brilliant review of Weston's 1925 Mexican exhibition, in which he said:

. . . In Weston's photographs, the texture, the physical quality, of things is rendered with the utmost exactness: the rough is rough, the smooth is smooth, flesh is alive, stone is hard.

The things have a definite proportion and weight, and are placed at a clearly defined distance one from another. In one word, the beauty which these photographs of Weston's possess is Photographic Beauty!¹⁸⁷

Weston received such widely divergent opinions from various artists and critics that he soon realized there could

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. ¹⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 224-25.

¹⁸⁷ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico, Vol. I, The Daybooks of Edward Weston (New York: Wittenborn & Company, 1961), p. 129.

be no universal standard of criticism. He listened to fresh unbiased opinions as readily as those of an important critic. He accepted and rejected criticism and went his own way. The realization had come through himself when he was ready. This acceptance and rejection also entered into his approach to the work of others. He took from others what he could understand, because he believed that more cannot be taken without merely copying. Weston judged his photography according to how it affected him emotionally. Whenever he could feel a Bach fugue in his work, he knew that he had arrived.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Nancy Newhall, The Daybooks of Edward Weston, California, II, 175, 234-35.

Chapter 4

THE THEORIES OF ANSEL ADAMS

The beauty of a photograph does not lie in the assortment of technical facts about negative, material, papers, and developers--it lies in the realization of the photographer's vision. What we have to say is infinitely more important than our mechanical means of saying it. On the other hand, our message should not be clouded with poor techniques, shallow taste, and inflexible methods.¹

PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN ART FORM

Art should enlarge our personal experience. Photography, as a medium of creative expression, fails when the elements of experience and communication of the deeper and more intangible aspects of the world are made secondary to the elements of craftsmanship.² Adams writes that the photographic medium has advanced to extraordinary perfection as

¹Ansel Adams, "What Is Good Photography?," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 24.

²Ansel Adams, The Negative (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), p. 42.

a craft, but only the work of a few exceptional workers has matched the accomplishments of the 1840's. David Octavius Hill, for example, succeeded in making remarkable photographs and in demonstrating one of the basic principles of art: complete expression within the limitations of the medium.³ Photography should be evaluated by this principle, not by exotic tradition, prejudice, or misinterpretation of the contemporary viewpoint.⁴ Photography, since the time of Hill, was not entirely one of progress. The honesty and directness of the medium were nullified by the romantic tendencies of the late nineteenth century, when photography turned to a shallow restatement of the qualities and intentions of painting and the other graphic media of that period.⁵

Adams clearly expressed his personal credo about photography when he wrote:

. . . A great photograph is a full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed in the deepest sense, and is, thereby, a true expression of what one feels about life in its entirety. And the expression of what one feels should be set forth in terms of simple devotion to the medium--a statement of the utmost clarity

³ Ansel Adams, Making a Photograph (New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1939), p. 13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

and perfection possible under the conditions of creation and production. That will explain why I have no patience with unnecessary complications of technique or presentation. I prefer a fine lens because it gives me the best possible optical image, a fine camera because it complements the function of the lens, fine materials because they convey the qualities of the image to the highest degree. I use smooth papers because I know they reveal the utmost of image clarity and brilliance, and I mount my prints on simple cards because I believe any "fussiness" only distracts from and weakens the print. I do not retouch or manipulate my prints because I believe in the importance of the direct optical and chemical image. I use the legitimate controls of the medium only to augment the photographic effect. Purism, in the sense of rigid abstention from any control, is ridiculous; the logical controls of exposure, development and printing are essential in the revelation of photographic qualities. The correction of tonal deficiencies by dodging, and the elimination of obvious defects by spotting, are perfectly legitimate elements of the craft. As long as the final result of the procedure is photographic, it is entirely justified. But when a photograph has the "feel" of an etching or a lithograph, or any other graphic medium, it is questionable--just as questionable as a painting that is photographic in character. . . .⁶

Sensitivity to the Subject

Subject matter should be accepted for what it is.

The photographer should use the most appropriate objects to

⁶ Ansel Adams, "A Personal Credo," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 29-30.

express his thoughts and convey his vision. If we think of beauty as something more than mere prettiness, every subject can be transmuted into a photographic expression of beauty. In that sense, no object is more or less beautiful than any other.⁷ What is required, is for the photographer to develop a sensitivity to the important and true qualities of the world in which he lives. It makes no difference whether the function of the photograph is simple and practical, or if it relates to a most personal and abstract emotion. The photographer's honesty of spirit, and sincerity of intention, can make any expression valid and beautiful.⁸

The Photograph's Message

A photograph reveals the perceptions and emotions of its creator in response to a particular environment. Adams says that no man has the right to dictate what other men should perceive, create or produce. Unfortunately, in the modern commercial world, a concern with the spectacular and the appearance of things has inhibited simple and direct personal expression. The creative person seldom has the opportunity to contribute his own qualities of perception and

⁷ Adams, "What Is Good Photography?," p. 24.

⁸ Adams, "A Personal Credo," p. 26.

emotion in the face of accepted patterns of thought and interpretation. "The advertising photographer 'adjusts' himself to his client; the competitive salon photographer often thinks more of acceptances and awards than of his own inner creative convictions."⁹

Even though we may have something to say and the desire to say it, most of us are confused as to what constitutes reality. We are conventional in what we consider significant and important. We are afraid to see, feel, and express aspects of the world which are not obvious, popular, and safe. The creative photographer discovers and reveals something new about the world. He does not merely follow the paths of conventional seeing and doing.¹⁰

Photography is capable of transmitting thoughts and emotions with clarity and intensity. It can open tremendous personal vistas of perception and understanding, but the experience of a photograph requires energy and patience, both to produce, and to comprehend in the finished form.¹¹ The making of a photograph requires an acute perception of

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ansel Adams, "Exploring the Commonplace," U.S. Camera, VII, 4 (May, 1944), 33.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 31.

detail in the subject. The viewing of a fine print requires more than superficial scrutiny. Photographs are usually looked at casually; they are seldom looked into. The wealth of details, forms, and values, revealed so exquisitely by the lens, are vitally significant. They deserve to be explored and appreciated. It takes time to really see, feel, and experience a fine print.¹²

Environment Effects

The environment in which the creative artist works must of necessity influence his art. There is an intellectual approach to photography in those areas of the country where there is little human or natural interest. Photographs, which are made in these areas, tend to be built upon contrivances. The photographic environment has to be created. In an area of the country where there is considerable visual interest, the photographer simply expresses what is there.¹³ Good creative work can be accomplished in either environment. Time and effort is required in the production of a good photograph. The ease with which we can obtain a superficial

¹²Adams, "A Personal Credo," p. 31.

¹³Ira Latour, "West Coast Photography--Does It Really Exist?," Photography, XII, 6 (June, 1957), 27.

image often leads to creative disaster.¹⁴ Once a person has something to say, and has the incentive to express what he feels, his latent expressive talent will blossom forth.¹⁵

Adams' Approach to Photography

A photograph is dependent upon the photographer's basic attitude and experience. Adams' approach to photography is based on his belief in the vigor and values of the world of nature. He believes in growing things, and in the things which have grown and died magnificently. He believes in people, in the simple aspects of human life, and in the relation of man to nature.¹⁶

Photography demands precision, patience, and a devotion to the capacities of the craft. Sometimes technique is exalted for its own sake; sometimes a faulty technique renders important statements impotent. Conversely, the "machine-gun" approach to photography--by which many negatives are made with the hope that one will be good--is

¹⁴Adams, "A Personal Credo," p. 29.

¹⁵Ansel Adams, "Contemporary American Photography," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels (New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), p. 21.

¹⁶Adams, "A Personal Credo," p. 31.

fatal to serious results.

Adams' approach to the medium is through straight photography. A photograph is not an accident, but a concept to be seen or visualized before the time of exposure. The final print is rendered by the processes peculiar to the medium. "Changes and augmentations can be effected during these processes," writes Adams, "but the fundamental thing which was 'seen' is not altered in basic concept."¹⁷

There are no rules to tell the photographer how he must see. Seeing is controlled by the photographer's perception and imagination. The correct camera angle is the one that reveals the subject in the most intense and significant way.¹⁸

PHOTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS

General Concepts

No single camera or photographic technique is capable of everything. The photographer's problem is to select the cameras and lenses that are best suited to the requirements of his work. The physique, temperament, and objectives

¹⁷Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁸Ansel Adams, Camera and Lens (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1958), p. 19.

of the photographer play a key role in determining what equipment he will select. Ansel Adams has a battery of cameras and experiments with every new technique that comes on the market so that he will be prepared for various kinds of assignments.¹⁹

Concepts About Perspective

There are a great many books about perspective, but nothing takes the place of direct experimentation. A photograph shows best how: working too close to the subject with a short focal length lens tends to exaggerate facial structure and contour, or how the quality of roundness in portraiture can be lost by working too far from the subject and depending on a very long focal length lens to increase the image size. Unusual effects of perspective should fall within reasonable limits. If a cylindrical object is to be photographed in perspective, its image should never be so exaggerated that there is a question as to its true form.²⁰

¹⁹ Ansel Adams, Natural Light Photography (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1952), p. 80; and statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Ansel Adams, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 22, 1966.

²⁰ Adams, Camera and Lens, pp. 25-26.

Concepts About Lighting

Light, playing on form, texture, and substance, reveals the object. The photographer does not need to make an extensive study of the physics of light, but he should be acquainted with certain aspects of its behavior that are important because of their relation to his medium. Our perception of form is both tactile and visual. Therefore, the photographer must apply artificial lighting in relation to the form of the subject. If necessary, artificial illumination can be built up on an object from many indirect sources in various positions.²¹

Natural light is basically uncontrollable, but form can be clarified and accentuated by the proper orientation of the subject to the light. There are three main types of natural light: sunlight, skylight, and shielded light which includes natural indoor light from windows, doorways, and skylights. Countless variations on these three basic types of light exist.²²

Artificial lighting may have a questionable aesthetic effect upon the subject, but the limitations of the

²¹Adams, Natural Light Photography, p. 82.

²²Ibid.

sensitive emulsion must be taken into account. It is quite proper to use artificial lighting to simulate the visual effect of the world as we see it. Delicate fill-in illumination, such as reflected from a white umbrella or screen, will effectively serve to fill-in shadow areas which might otherwise fall beyond the range of the negative when the high values are properly rendered.²³

Lighting should be appropriate to the subject. It is not wrong to use multiple lights, but it is usually unnecessary. A simple approach to lighting--using a minimum of light sources--tends to create a convincing reality in the photograph. The photograph should not stress the lighting more than the subject. Multiple lighting is justified on those occasions when intentional dramatic effects require it. It is useful for creating strong contrasts, intricate highlight and shadow effects, and to provide adequate illumination of complex subjects.²⁴

Artificial lighting is an instrument of control for the creative photographer. It makes tremendous departures

²³ Ansel Adams and Nancy Newhall, Fiat Lux: The University of California (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 192.

²⁴ Adams, Natural Light Photography, p. 1.

from reality possible. By evaluating the properties of illumination, the photographer is in a position to express himself freely, without depending upon arbitrary rules.²⁵

Concepts About Texture

Texture is one of the most important elements of photography, because we fail to perceive a three dimensional surface if the object's surface textures fall below the limits of visual resolution. In portraiture, the rendition of skin texture is of vital importance. If it is not rendered with clarity and depth of tone, the form and expression of the subject may be lost.

If a photograph reveals texture, it will usually convey the impression of substance and light. The analysis of textured surfaces, under a powerful microscope, will reveal that what appears to be a smooth and polished surface is really an intricate organization of heights and hollows. Such an object seems smooth and of continuous tone when it actually possesses an infinite variety of forms and tonal values.²⁶

²⁵Ansel Adams, Artificial-Light Photography (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1956), p. 83.

²⁶Ansel Adams, Making a Photograph (New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1939), pp. 61, 81; and Adams, Natural Light Photography, p. 31.

The photographer must determine whether or not the textures that he sees with his eyes can be resolved photographically. He may visualize an interesting photographic composition of textures only to find that in the final print the rich surface textures of the subject appear as continuous, uninteresting grays.

There is greater emphasis on the structure of an object, than on its textural qualities, when the camera distance is increased. Beyond a certain distance, the natural textures of objects cannot be resolved by the lens or emulsion. Huge granite boulders may appear as perfectly smooth stones. If the photographer wishes to suggest the substance of these stones, it will be necessary to include one stone in the very near foreground. If its texture is revealed adequately, the viewer will assume that all the stones are of the same material. This awareness of substance is of vital importance in photography, because photographs must "read" clearly.²⁷

The impression of light in a print influences the impression of texture. Textured objects that are photographed with a large proportion of completely black shadow

²⁷ Adams, Natural Light Photography, p. 31.

areas are difficult to understand. If the greater part of the image surface is well illuminated, the mind will sometimes visualize the substance of small shadow areas.²⁸

Adams believes that photography has capacities for expression that no other art medium possesses, and states:

. . . What I choose to call the microscopic revelation of the lens is perhaps the dominant characteristic of photography as differentiated from the other mediums. The utmost refinement of texture demands adequate optical equipment, accurate exposure and processing, and smooth papers. It rejects diffused focus images, careless manipulation of lenses and apparatus and rough papers. Texture--strictly photographic texture--is abandoned in Bromoil, Gum, Transfer processes to a large extent, and in the use of paper negatives. Hence, all methods that obscure the most subtle quality of good photography--the rendering of minute textures--serve only to defeat the purity of photographic expression.²⁹

Concepts About Tonal Values

Tonal values are closely associated with texture because texture is dependent upon tone. Texture and tone can be combined and controlled photographically to suggest substance. Texture without tone is merely detail. Tone is entirely a relative quality; it is in the right depth of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ansel Adams, "An Exposition of My Photographic Technique," Camera Craft, XLI, 1 (January, 1934), 20.

tone that the emotional effects of photographic values exist. That is why a photometrically accurate presentation of the subject can be disturbing. Adams says it is here that the turning point in the argument on photography as a fine art lies, and it is here that the justification of a pure photographic technique is found. Certain tonal harmonies are most effective in certain registers. The artistic sensibilities of the photographer can define this proper relationship, but once defined and visualized, the technique must be adequate to present it.³⁰

Concepts About Photographic Toning

The aesthetic objection to toning lies in the fact that certain colors veil the photographic image. They are never a part of the image either visually or psychologically. Red, green, or blue tones can be the most objectionable, but the ordinary sepia tone and the hypo-alum tone are not much better. However, the cold purple-brown that is obtained from a slight degree of gold toning on a very cold blue-black print tone, appears as part of the image. It greatly intensifies the range of a print's tonal values. "This intensification," Adams says, "is chiefly

³⁰ Ibid.

psychological, but there is a slight actual deepening of values as well."³¹ Adams warns that the degree of toning must be very slight. It should never be obvious--and it should be apparent only through a comparison with an untuned print.³²

Concepts About Time and Motion

A photograph represents a moment sliced out of time. Time progression cannot be directly indicated. The painter can represent different parts of the subject in varying moments of time, but the photographer must suggest the passage of time through an indication of subject motion. This is accomplished by the point of view, the composition, and the tonal relationships selected by the photographer as well as by the degree to which motion is arrested in the subject. Long exposure times reveal subject motion; extremely short exposures merely reveal the subject in a static moment.³³

³¹Ansel Adams, "Printing," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), VIII, 2991.

³²Ibid.

³³Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 62.

Concepts About Portraiture

In great portraiture, a pose is never actually a pose. It is a moment, selected by the photographer, when the subject stands revealed. This visualization will be appropriate, if the photographer becomes aware of what he or she feels about the subject.³⁴

It helps to see examples of great portraiture and to carefully study the use of lighting, environment, and image values. But, rigid plans and lighting formulas inhibit creative expression. The photographer should understand that every face represents a specific problem, not only of physical form, line and texture, but of expressive and interpretive qualities as well.³⁵ The rendering of a facial expression is a fundamental but vital problem. An expression cannot be adequately recorded by the camera, because it represents features in motion over a span of time. The camera can only record periods of repose during a progression of facial expressions. A portrait must be made when the features are in some kind of logical, poised

³⁴ Ansel Adams and others, "The Workshop Idea in Photography," Aperture, IX, 4 (1960), 160.

³⁵ Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. 83.

relationship if a grimace is to be avoided.³⁶

Sunlight, because of its relatively deep shadows, is the most difficult natural light source for portraiture. It can be satisfactory very early or very late in the day, when the sun's rays are nearly parallel with the axis of the lens. Adams believes that axis sunlight is the most luminous and revealing light of all. The photographer can avoid projecting a shadow on the subject by a slight displacement of the camera position from true axis. The greater the focal length of the lens, or the greater the distance between camera and subject, the less this displacement need be.³⁷

Environmental portraiture provides the photographer with an opportunity to portray individuals, accessories, and symbolic environments in a highly imaginative way. The environment plays an important part in the expressive portrait image. A background can suggest space, it can suggest the personal accessories of the subject, and it can create or intensify moods. It can accent the characteristics of the subject through the construction of forms,

³⁶ Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 81.

³⁷ Adams, Natural Light Photography, p. 82.

moods, light, and shade.³⁸

Environmental portraiture involves more than just background control. Adams calls it a philosophy of "seeing" and interpretation. He says:

. . . It is not necessarily concerned with obvious relationships--such as a literary man pictured in his library, or a mathematician before his blackboard. It reaches farther into the personality of the individual portrayed, associating him with elements suggestive of his inner qualities. . . . In search of symbolic environment we might place a highly intellectual person in a composition of precise instrument dials, gleaming with glass and chrome and cryptic symbols. The impression of precision, sharpness and complexity might very well relate to the personality of the subject. . . .³⁹

The idea is not to relate a specific profession and the background, such as might be the case were he an electronic engineer or machinist. "True environmental portraiture," says Adams, "involves the association of moods, symbols and oblique relationships rather than factual and obvious relationships."⁴⁰

The environment should function in a symbolic sense. It is an environment that interprets or intensifies the mood

³⁸ Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. 86.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the subject. Adams believes that in this phase of photography the photographer's personal interpretations and reactions are paramount and should not be influenced by the concepts of other photographers.⁴¹

Concepts About Architectural Photography

The architectural photographer may approach his subject matter from two major points of view. He can either show the function of the architecture in relation to its use and appearance, or he can emphasize the structure's design and style.⁴²

There are four specific problems that face the architectural photographer: (1) rendering the 3 dimensional aspects of the subject, (2) the lighting, (3) the correct rendering of color values and substances, and (4) the architectural concept, and the environment of the subject.⁴³

The photographer need not sacrifice his personal inclinations regarding composition and interpretation, but he must remember that he is reproducing subject material with

⁴¹Adams, Natural Light Photography, p. 89.

⁴²Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 84.

⁴³Ansel Adams, "Architectural Photography," Encyclopedia of Photography (1963), II, 235.

an established design and organization. Therefore, some knowledge of architectural forms and of the principles of function and design is helpful.⁴⁴

Concepts About Advertising Photography

The advertising photographer can either represent the subject as it is, or he can interpret it. Adams believes that the ideal advertising photograph should combine the qualities of both in a proper balance, depending on the function of the photograph.⁴⁵

Concepts About Documentary Photography

The documentary photograph is an interpretation of the social scene by means of commentary. One form of documentary photography relates people to contemporary civilization and social conditions. The other records the material evidence of culture, architecture, art, and other forms of human expression. The subject matter of the documentary photograph is always dated. It is contemporary, but it may also reveal the implications of the period.⁴⁶

Sometimes the documentary photograph is a mere fragment of reality extracted from the context of the whole.

⁴⁴Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 81.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 84. ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 88.

Through this extraction, or by the applications of captions or legends, the truth of the statement can be seriously distorted. The photographer himself may not be to blame. For example, the photographs that were made for the Farm Resettlement Administration were intended to record and interpret the plight of the farmers and their land. Their purpose was to stir public interest in the problems of resettlement. As time went on, these photographs were used for other purposes. Occasionally, they were used for social propaganda, but during World War II they were used by our wartime enemies as scenes that were typical of life in America.⁴⁷

In a sense, all photography is documentary. Even a landscape can be considered documentary, in the sense that it relates to contemporary thought reflected in the aesthetic conception of the photographer.⁴⁸

Concepts About Landscape Photography

The landscape photograph should transcend the literal aspects of the subject. By intellectualizing nature, the

⁴⁷ Ansel Adams, "Contemporary American Photography," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels (New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), pp. 22-23.

⁴⁸ Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 88.

photographer intensifies the potential emotional significance of the subject.

The tendency in most landscape photography is to intentionally romanticize naturalistic material. However, naturalistic material responds very well to photographic objectivity. "The problem," says Adams, "is to preserve a basic simplicity of composition with an intense unity of expression."⁴⁹

The landscape photographer is faced with major technical difficulties; yet the amount of control that he can exercise is limited. He must: (1) adjust the focus to accommodate both near and distant objects, (2) determine a balanced exposure for extreme lighting ratios, (3) adjust the exposure in relation to objects in motion, and (4) determine the proper color correction. The photographer must consider the degree of filter control that he wishes to exercise. Through the correct use of color-filters, with various types of negative materials, it is possible to: change the degree of aerial perspective, alter the tonal value of the sky in relation to clouds and other objects, and to exercise some control over intense shadows.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁰Ibid.

Concepts About Pictorial Photography

The romantic approach toward photography is termed "Pictorialism." Pictorial photography is still popular, but there is a revival of interest in the purity of the medium.⁵¹ Most of the pictures of the pictorialists have little aesthetic quality or solidity of expression. They lack creative intensity and a true knowledge of the medium.⁵²

ANSEL ADAMS ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

The procedures that the photographer follows tend to become automatic as his experience grows. A mastery of his craft, allows the photographer to make his evaluations and arrangements rapidly. Whether a photographic problem requires careful contemplation or immediate solution, the greater the technical capacity of the photographer--the more perfect the intuitive response will be.⁵³

Adams' Approach to Craftsmanship

The photographer does not need to understand

⁵¹Ibid., p. 14.

⁵²Adams, "Contemporary American Photography," p. 24.

⁵³Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. 88.

mathematical lens formulas, or the complicated chemical structure of his emulsions, but he must fully understand the photographic properties of the emulsions and lenses that he uses as well as the principles of their application.⁵⁴ The photographer should develop a familiarity with his equipment so that he can work quickly and surely. Otherwise, many opportunities will be lost because of time lost in uncertain groping.⁵⁵

Technique should be taken for granted. The photographer should be free to think of the means and methods of communication. Technique is justified only so far as it will simplify and clarify the photographer's concept.⁵⁶ Creative photography requires an adequate technique, but a technically perfect photograph can be revolting as a work of art.⁵⁷ The Zone System approach worked out by Ansel Adams links technique to the aesthetic approach and gives the photographer control over his medium.

⁵⁴ Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Adams, Camera and Lens, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. v.

⁵⁷ Ansel Adams, "An Exposition of My Photographic Technique," Camera Craft, XLI, 1 (January, 1934), 20-22.

The Zone System of Planned Photography

This system separates the tonal values of the subject into zones. It provides the photographer with a method of exposure, development, and printing control, to achieve a pre-determined tonal structure.⁵⁸ Adams says that his whole philosophy of creative photography involves a direct relationship between the brightness of a given area of the subject and the density or opacity in the corresponding portion of the negative. The objective is to obtain the desired tone value in the print.⁵⁹

In the Zone System, Adams breaks down the gray scale into 10 convenient steps with solid black and pure white as the extremes. There are 8 shades of gray in between--not too many to visualize, and yet enough to symbolize various values in the subject.

Adams studied a large number of prints and found that any particular subject matter is usually rendered, within fairly narrow limits, in the same particular gray. For example, the average tonal value of normal caucasian skin in

⁵⁸ Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), p. 364.

⁵⁹ Ansel Adams, The Negative (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), p. 2.

sunlight approximates the value of Zone VI--one zone above middle gray of the gray scale. Snow in full shade usually approximates the gray in Zone VIII. There are occasionally variations for special interpretive purposes, but most zonal representations are fairly uniform throughout the work of any one photographer.⁶⁰

The Zone System depends upon the photographer's ability to group subject values so that they correspond to the various steps of the gray scale. He does this according to his personal concept of how the tonal values should be represented. The advantage of the Zone System is that it enables the photographer to devise a standard procedure for exposure and development that will give consistent negative quality.⁶¹

The Perfect Negative

There are two points of view as to what constitutes a perfect negative--the scientific and the artistic. What is considered to be a perfect negative from the scientific viewpoint, may be a complete failure from the artistic. A negative is only perfect insofar as it relates to the solution of a particular problem. Technique is essential to

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 16

⁶¹ Ibid.

good photography, but we must distinguish between the scientific and artistic problems of the medium.⁶²

Adams warns his students about narrowness and "purity." He believes that the imperfect negative should be printed because it may represent some of the photographer's strongest work. Moreover, it is impossible to obtain negatives of absolutely consistent physical qualities, because of inaccurate shutters, and variations in individual lenses, or batches of film. Fortunately, the latitude in negative emulsions allows for some deviation without seriously affecting the final results. Moderate irregularities in the negative may be counteracted through the control of printing paper and print developers.⁶³

Adams and the Print

Adams realizes that the glossy surface does not insure success; in fact, it merely exaggerates any inadequacies of concept and technique. His preference for that surface is dictated by a desire to achieve an image of maximum

⁶² Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 34

⁶³ David Vestal, "David in Adamsland," Popular Photography, LXI, 6 (December, 1967), 98; and Adams, The Negative, p. 25.

clarity and brilliancy with a minimum suggestion of paper texture. Adams does not restrict himself to glossy paper alone. A specific printing problem may cause him to select another surface. He prefers a semi-gloss, slightly textured paper for a photomural or a photo screen because the paper texture actually augments the impression of definition in the greatly enlarged image. It also makes spotting a simpler task. On the other hand, a high-gloss print is an excellent choice for an especially brilliant image, such as a 4 x 5 snow scene.⁶⁴

Craftsmanship and the Living Element

The creative photographer has two pitfalls to watch out for. The first pitfall is the exaltation of technique for its own sake. The second, is the weakening of a serious and potentially important statement by an inferior technique. The first pitfall can be avoided when the photographer realizes that "seeing," or visualization, is the important element. Adams writes:

. . . A photograph is not an accident--it is a concept. It exists at, or before, the moment of exposure of the negative. From that moment on to the final print, the process is chiefly one of

⁶⁴ Ansel Adams, The Print (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), p. 1.

craft; the pre-visualized photograph is rendered in terms of the final print by a series of processes peculiar to the medium. True, changes and augmentations can be effected during these processes, but the fundamental thing which was "seen" is not altered in basic concept.⁶⁵

The second pitfall can be avoided by an approach to the medium that is based upon precision, patience, and devotion to the capacities of the craft.⁶⁶

The color sensitivity of different emulsions will cause subject values to be rendered in different tonal values. For example, red will not be recorded on orthochromatic film, and green will be recorded somewhat darker on panchromatic film than on ortho film.

The modern photographer has a wide choice of negative materials and filters available to him. Experience and logical experimentation, with the various emulsion types and filters, provide the photographer with many stimulating interpretive possibilities.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ansel Adams, "A Personal Credo," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 30.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Adams, The Negative, pp. 5, 35.

Tone reproduction, sensitometrically speaking, is concerned with the accurate proportional relationship between brightnesses in the subject and values in the print. But, creative photography cannot hold to scientific definitions. Sometimes, departures from reality may require a non-literal approach--in other words, an emotional control of values that may be at variance with photometric standards.⁶⁸

Adams, in his book The Print, points out that: if the opacities in a negative bear a reasonable relation to the brilliancies in the visualized print, prints of many subtle variations of tonalities can be made. He writes:

. . . Although the actual difference of values in various prints made from the same negative may be rather small, the emotional effect of such slight variations may be considerable. As a rule, I have found that the most expressive prints are usually of somewhat deeper tonality than a literal transcription of the negative (or of the subject) would suggest. . . . On examination of the first print, even after it is mounted and spotted, the photographer may become acutely aware of the need for some variation of effect to express his concept more intensely, or to expand his original concept. His next print may depart considerably from his original intent.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁹ Adams, The Print (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), p. 1.

The original concept of the photographer, together with his thoughts or attitudes about the making of the print, must remain flexible. He should remember that it is the image itself, and not a mere arbitrary sequence of tonal values, that conveys his concept.⁷⁰

Photography is more than a medium for the factual communication of ideas. However, even the most "factual" photograph contains potentially aesthetic and emotional qualities. These qualities augment and clarify the informational content of the photograph. They make photography a creative art.

The emphasis on technique is justified only insofar as it will simplify and clarify the statement or concept that the photographer wishes to make. Craft should not be permitted to inhibit creativity--and the creative aims of the photographer must not interfere with good craftsmanship. The photographer should acquire a working technique for creative photography. But, in order to do this, he must acquire a fundamental understanding of both techniques and their application.⁷¹

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ansel Adams, Artificial-Light Photography (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1956), p. vi; and Ansel Adams and others, "The Workshop Idea in Photography," Aperture, IX, 4 (1961), 158.

STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

The understanding of photography, as a form of art, requires more than a knowledge of physics, chemistry, and painting. The medium must be studied in its own terms and within the framework of its own limitations. It is only by accepting photography's limitations, and applying them to their logical conclusion, that the photographer can use the medium as a potent and pure art form.⁷²

The Unique Qualities of the Photographic
Medium

The eye and the camera see quite differently. The creative photographer has to develop an awareness of what the camera sees. The camera cannot make subjective interpretations as the eye can; photography is an objective medium of expression. It records reality, as it is perceived by the photographer, and renders it in terms of the optical, chemical, and physical properties of the medium.⁷³

⁷²Ansel Adams, Making a Photograph (New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1939), p. 14; and Nancy Newhall, The Eloquent Light (San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1963), p. 69.

⁷³Ansel Adams, Camera and Lens (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1958), p. 25; and Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 61.

Photography Compared to Painting

The technique of composition in photography is not related to the technique of composition in other media. Adams describes photographic composition as the relation of subject-forms to surface-forms of the print. It can be controlled by adjusting the boundaries of the surface forms, as related sectors, on the edges of the print. The tonal weight of areas within the photograph, and the emotional significance of the dominant elements of the subject, influence the sector-relationships. There are no fixed rules of composition. In photography, composition is approximate at best. The extent to which composition can be controlled depends upon the intuitive capacity of the photographer.⁷⁴

The painter may use certain formal concepts as the basis of design, but it is futile for the photographer to impose arbitrary design formulas on the world of the camera. The synthetic basis of painting allows the artist a great deal of compositional freedom; the photographer has only limited control over objects in the external world. Apart from intentionally exaggerating the lighting and tonal values, it is only by changing the viewpoint of the lens

⁷⁴Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 61.

that the photographer can effect basic changes in the appearance of the subject.⁷⁵

Some photographers arbitrarily restrict their photographs to certain sizes and proportions, but in photography the inherent geometry of the subject should determine the proportions of the final picture and the arrangement of the image within its area. The picture area should provide appropriate space for the vital presentation of the subject forms.⁷⁶

Straight Photography and the Purist Approach

The imitation of other media is basically false because it can only be superficial at best. The photographic conception is entirely different from that of painting, and the photographer must choose those materials that will preserve the inherent qualities of the photographic image. The textured paper surface may confuse the rendered textures of the photographic image. Papers that do not reflect the maximum amount of light, serve to restrict the clarity and intensity of the photographic values.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Adams, Camera and Lens, p. 19.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁷Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 62.

The retouched photograph is false because any manipulation of the negative or print only serves to defeat the intensity of the photographic expression. However, Adams says that the removal of mechanical defects, such as: spots, scratches, or stains is essential. This kind of handwork on the photographic negative or print must not be confused with retouching or altering the photographic image. Print spotting does not destroy the "purity" of the photographic image.⁷⁸

The extreme "purist" objects to any form of print control, but the creation of a perfect negative and print without human "interference" is impossible. In Adams' view, print dodging is perfectly admissible when necessary. The reduction and intensification of the negative is also permissible, but the resultant effects of control must be photographic--mechanically and aesthetically.⁷⁹ Questionable manipulation refers to elements of control that are not photographic in nature, such as, retouching or brushwork. It also refers to the illogical use of legitimate elements of control. But, the subject range is often beyond the capacity of the negative and the negative beyond the capacity of the print. When this occurs, a certain amount of

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

printing control seems justifiable. Control that is directed towards producing the ideal photographic expression is good; control and manipulation that alters the character of the photograph is a very different thing. Photographic controls should be used with precision and taste. They are not so much a means of creating effects as they are a means of overcoming deficiencies of the negative in relation to the visualization of the photograph.⁸⁰

Ansel Adams and the Straight Approach

Adams photographs objects as he finds them in the natural world. He does not attempt to rearrange them physically or to use tricks or manipulation. His selection of a camera is guided by the nature of the subject since straight photography is not limited to the use of any particular camera. In the main, Adams uses an 8 x 10 view camera, making contact prints or occasionally an enlargement. Occasionally, he will use a 35 mm. camera, a 4 x 5 Polaroid, or a 2¼ x 2¼ Hasselblad.⁸¹ Adams believes that the

⁸⁰ Ansel Adams, "Printing," The Complete Photographer (1941-1943), VIII, 2992.

⁸¹ "Ansel Adams," The Encyclopedia of Photography (1965), I, 70.

finest works of photography have been produced through a straightforward approach to the medium, and with a simple but craftsmanlike technique. "Pure" or "straight" photography is more a product of clean-cut thought and emotion than of laboratory processes. The "purist" is motivated by honest aesthetic considerations rather than weak sentimentality.⁸²

PREVISUALIZATION

Adams' basic approach to photography is dependent upon previsualization. Photography requires the ability to previsualize the final result as well as the technical capability to achieve it. The photographer must have a mastery over his craft--from the time of exposure, to the mounting of the final print. But, he must also be able to visualize the completed photograph before the shutter is operated.⁸³

The ability to previsualize is important because it gives the photographer a control over the medium, a command

⁸²Adams, Making a Photograph, p. 15; and statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Ansel Adams, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 22, 1966.

⁸³Adams and others, "The Workshop Idea in Photography," IX, 158; and Ansel Adams, "An Exposition of My Photographic Technique," Camera Craft, XLI, 1 (January, 1934), 20.

of his own interpretive style, and it enables him to effectively handle a wide variety of photographic problems. Pre-visualization allows the photographer to visualize the subject, from a particular point of view and with a particular interpretation, as it will appear in the final print. It is a subjective and creative approach to photography rather than a sensitometric or "tone-reproduction" approach.⁸⁴

Free Interpretation vs. Realistic Interpretation

A photographic print is either a realistic representation of a subject or a free interpretation of it. If it is a realistic representation of the subject, the tonal values will be closely related to the brightnesses of the subject. No print can successfully reproduce the brightnesses of the average subject; but if the print values have a proportionate relation to those in the subject, the representation may be considered "literal." If the photograph is to be a free interpretation, then the values in the print may represent a definite departure from reality.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ansel Adams, The Negative (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), p. 21; Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. vi; and Adams, "An Exposition of My Photographic Technique," XLI, 20.

⁸⁵ Adams, The Negative, p. 21; and Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. vi.

How Tonal Values Are Controlled

There are four basic ways that the usual exposure-development printing procedures may be modified. The photographer can: (1) alter the exposure and development process, (2) select a paper of a different exposure scale from that ordinarily used, (3) control the printing or enlarging light and the time of exposure, and (4) vary the print-developing time or alter the composition of the print-developing solution. Adams believes that the most important control lies in the exposure and development of the negative, and the use of but one contrast grade of paper, because this vastly simplifies darkroom procedure, and assures a more positive fulfillment of the original visualization.⁸⁶

It is not the actual brightnesses, but the relationships between them, that we wish to represent in the print. The problem is one of both concept and procedure: first, we are aware of the subject for its factual and emotional content; second, we visualize the print through which we desire to express our concept of the subject; third, we measure the dominant brightnesses in the subject

⁸⁶ Adams, The Negative, p. 34.

with an exposure meter to determine their range and place them on the exposure scale and, finally, the negative is exposed and developed for the desired rendition.⁸⁷

The low values can be "placed" by exposure and the high values "controlled" through development because: although increased development results in a higher effective placement of all values, the low values are changed far less than the high values. Decreased development results in a lower effective placement of values, with the lowest tones being least affected.⁸⁸

Tonal values are altered by changing the contrast through exposure and development control--the higher values can be made still lighter by expanding the contrast, or darker by diminishing the contrast. Filters make further exaggerations possible. In addition, values are modified by the spectral response of the photographic emulsion. A photographer can choose an emulsion and a filter to render the intensities and colors of a subject as he desires in the final print. However, values always retain their basic visual light-dark relationships. We cannot reverse the natural sequence of values, except with extreme color

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

correction or with the use of "color blind" or infra-red sensitive emulsions. For example, Caucasian skin is always lighter than most foliage, and sunlit clouds are always lighter than blue sky.⁸⁹

The Negative-Print Relationship

In a "normal" negative, the range of opacities is suitably adapted to the particular kind of printing paper to be used. It is possible to determine the degree of development required to give a negative of the desired opacity range, as placement on the exposure scale determines the degree of development needed to obtain a negative of the desired range of densities (opacities). The exposure and the development of the negative may be outlined before the shutter is actually released. When we are working with individual exposures, such as is the case with cut film, the film may be developed in relation to the exposures. When working with roll film, the exposures should be planned in relation to a standard development.⁹⁰ The negative can be "designed" for a particular treatment of the positive. However, once visualization and plan of procedure are established, the exposure and development of the negative becomes a purely mechanical

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 5, 21.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 24-25, 92.

matter.⁹¹

Practical Testing and the Photographer

In creative photography, it is essential to establish a "norm" in regard to negative opacity. This norm is influenced not only by technical considerations, but by the photographer's own emotional and interpretive objectives.

Every photographer must establish his own norm in relation to his equipment and materials, because various lenses and shutters differ in their efficiency and results. Careful practical tests permit the photographer to understand the characteristics of his equipment and materials in relation to the work that he intends to do. Therefore, the photographer should run tests with the lenses, cameras, films, and developers that he intends to use.⁹²

Photography is no simpler than any other art. The photographer can be more certain of his results, and therefore make better use of his time and energy, if he establishes reliable procedures for achieving the desired expression. Adams writes: "The photographer must not hesitate to make tests--many times, if necessary. If his work means anything to him, it is worthy of constant investigation and

⁹¹Adams, The Negative, p. 25.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 25, 39.

evaluation."⁹³

Visualization of the Final Print

Creative and expressive photography requires a detailed visualization of the final print. The photographer must visualize the tonalities in which he wants certain important parts of the subject to be represented, and plan his exposure and film processing accordingly. Obviously, it is impossible to carry around a mental picture of all the varied shades of gray that may appear in a print, but the photographer can learn to visualize a gray scale made up of a definite small number of steps and to think of a final print in terms of these tones.⁹⁴

The perceptive artist is sensitive not only to the significance of the subject, to form, placement, and design, but also to the illusion of light, the revelation of substance, and the subtle relationships of tonalities. The Zone System allows the photographer to exercise control over the subtle relationships of tonalities, and to think of a final print in terms of tones. The System is a control method that permits the photographer to place the various brightnesses of the subject on the exposure scale, to

⁹³Ibid., p. 49.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

select an optimum development that corresponds to the placement, and to suit his methods to the printing processes that he employs.⁹⁵

Tonal control in the final print can result only if all the essential values are recorded in the negative. The photographer cannot modify certain features in the print unless that feature is suitably represented in the negative. We cannot create the illusion of substance, texture, or value from a badly underexposed negative, nor can we produce translucent high values from severely overexposed areas of the negative. But, given a reasonable negative, and considering the wide range of printing effects that are possible through printing control, a photographer can achieve the visualized image to a satisfactory degree.⁹⁶

The Expressive Print

The photographic print cannot be a literal transcription of the subject and it need not be a literal transcription of the negative. In expressive photography, the exposure and development of the negative are designed to achieve certain desirable qualities in the final print, and the print itself is an interpretation of the photographic

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

idea.⁹⁷

If the photographer knows what he desires in the print before he exposes the negative, he can expose and develop the negative to achieve the required sequence of opacities. A negative that is correctly exposed and developed is the foundation for the visualized print. The expressive print requires a minimum of development control, dodging, or the use of extreme paper grades. The procedure gives the photographer control over his craft and assures satisfactory results. With practice, careful experimentation, and a full understanding of the equipment used--this method becomes quite automatic.⁹⁸

Design's Role in Image Visualization

The element of design is extremely important in image visualization. It must be considered along with form, tone, and texture in a sensitive visualization of a photograph. But, sometimes a photographer's enthusiasm for the subject prevents him from perceiving it clearly. Space in nature is quite different from space that is confined or

⁹⁷ Ansel Adams, The Print (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), p. 1; and Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. vii.

⁹⁸ Adams, Artificial-Light Photography, p. vi.

or restricted by the picture's edges. In a photograph, space and forms must be made eloquent--they must not be an imitation of the painter's arrangements.⁹⁹

How to Previsualize

Photographic interpretation requires the photographer to explore the world that he lives in--to examine what lies before his eyes, and to visualize the subject for its significance as well as its substance, form, texture, relative brightnesses, and tonality.

The subject should not be seen, mentally isolated, and idealized. The photograph is a separate reality, and the photographer must immediately visualize the picture of the subject rather than to dwell on the subject itself. Value, color, background relationships, and scale, etc., must be considered as they will appear in the final print--not in terms of the external world.¹⁰⁰

A photographer's training in visualizing print values may be compared to a musician's training for the recognition of pitch, or the training that a painter

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Ansel Adams and others, "The Workshop Idea in Photography," Aperture, IX, 4 (1961), 160; and Adams, The Negative, p. 22.

must undergo in order to become aware of color values and relationships. Studying prints helps the photographer to learn to recognize the various tones and separations of tone, and their relationship to subject values.

The photographer should study the tonal values in photographic prints, then explore and develop an awareness of the tonal values in several aspects of the real world. Finally, an effort should be made to express something in the immediate environment. The ability to visualize prints can be sharpened in a very short time. The photographer can develop an awareness of the photographic possibilities that exist in the world, and awareness is as essential to photography as it is to any other form of art.¹⁰¹

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT

Adams' Response to Subject Matter

A photograph fails as an aesthetic expression of the subject if it is merely a superficial record. The expression must be an emotional amplification of the subject. The point of view, the organization of design elements within the photograph, the way that substance is revealed through texture, the tonal relationships, and the technical expression of all

¹⁰¹ Adams, The Negative, pp. 22, 25.

these elements amplify the subject's emotional qualities.¹⁰²

Adams sees the mysterious, living forces in nature. These idealizations of nature go far beyond mere technical perfection; they border on the profoundly spiritual. The photographs are so well constructed that Pollack, in his book The Picture History of Photography, compares them to pictorial architecture. Pollack writes:

. . . Adams, in addition, is ever alert to arrangements in nature that make for dramatic masses, counterbalance of forms, and subtle tones, as well as for stability of design to control the over-all image. In his best photographs each element is considered in relation to the whole picture.¹⁰³

The subject matter has always been important to Adams. If he chooses to photograph a rock, it must be presented as a rock. The print augments and enlarges the experience of a rock. It stresses the tone and texture of a rock and yet it does not dramatize the rock. The photograph is an expression of the rock's essence, without emotional or symbolic connotations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ansel Adams, Making a Photograph (New York: The Studio Publications Inc., 1939), p. 61.

¹⁰³ Peter Pollack, The Picture History of Photography (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1958), pp. 364-65.

¹⁰⁴ Nancy Newhall, The Eloquent Light (San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1963), pp. 68-69.

The Essence of the Subject vs. the Projection of
the Photographer

Each person sees and responds to the world in his own particular way. Two photographers can have a totally different response to the same subject because the personal characteristics, training, and experience of each individual may vary. Some photographers take reality and impose their thoughts and spirit upon it. Others reveal the quintessence of the subject and a photograph to them is an instrument of love and revelation.¹⁰⁵

Photography is an objective expression. It is a record of reality. The photographer should take everything as it is, without imposing any limitations on the subject or on himself. An object is something in itself--belonging to its environment. The photographer who thoroughly comprehends his medium visualizes his subject as a thing in itself, and does not impose qualities foreign to the actual basic qualities of the subject. He should express his conception of the qualities of the subject through his medium.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ansel Adams, "Introduction--Portfolio One," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 32.

¹⁰⁶ Ansel Adams, "Exploring the Commonplace," U.S. Camera, VII, 4 (May, 1944), 34; and Ansel Adams, "An

Sometimes, the photographer will not be able to describe with words the feelings and reactions he has towards the subject. There are purely emotional aspects to form, texture, light and shade. Adams writes:

. . . We can't talk about form; it can be revealed only in terms of itself. Form is latent (photographically speaking) in the subject; it becomes an actuality when it exists, in proper placement, on the two-dimensional picture-area of the finished photograph. We can't casually snap a picture and hope for a fine composition by cropping and printing trials. Form is a living thing; a thing of energy and vitality; a fine formal composition actually moves within itself in balanced dispersion of mass and implied energy. We must "see" the final result before the exposure is made. . . .¹⁰⁷

Adams believes that the awareness of the right moment in which to make a photograph is as vital as the perception of values, form, and other qualities. The photograph that happens by "accident" is practically non-existent; with pre-conditioned attitudes, we recognize and are arrested by the significant moment. When a photograph is contrived, and objects are consciously arranged, there is a wide opportunity to read all sorts of meanings into the photograph. The connotations that we read into natural objects, and

Exposition of My Photographic Technique," Camera Craft, XLI, 1 (January, 1934), 20.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, "Exploring the Commonplace," VII, 53.

combinations of objects, are frequently not applicable.¹⁰⁸

The Photographer's State of Mind

Adams interprets nature as it is. He does not use nature to express his own ideas. Whatever happens out there, he believes, is far more important than what happens within himself. The external event is far more important than any image the photographer can make of it. The photographer can add his personal imprint to any scene in spite of his limitations or those of his medium. Adams feels that when he is finished photographing, the resulting picture will carry a piece of himself as well as "what is out there."¹⁰⁹

Photography of an Inner State of Mind

What happens in front of the camera may be called the external event; what happens in the photographer's mind may be called the internal event. What happens in front of the camera, and what happens in the photographer's mind and eye affect the meaning of pictures.

The effective photograph peers beneath the surfaces

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.; and Ansel Adams, "A Personal Credo," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Nathan Resnick, "Intention and Reality: A Journey into Darkest Photography," Infinity, XVII, 5

of things. It is a record of the qualities of nature and humanity which live or are latent in all things.¹¹⁰ Nature can provide a vast source of basic forms and moods which the photographer may select and interpret as a mirror of his inner self, but Adams feels that art must reach further than impression or self revelation.¹¹¹

Departure from Reality

Creative photography is considerably more than a literal representation of the object before the lens. A photograph can be a free interpretation of the subject, controlled by psychological and emotional factors, as well as by optical and chemical laws.¹¹² The precise controls that exist in photography permit the photographer to realize his expressive intentions. For example, when the values in the print are related as closely as possible to the brightnesses of the subject, the representation may be considered

(May, 1968), 25; and statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Ansel Adams, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 22, 1966.

¹¹⁰ Adams, "Introduction--Portfolio One," pp. 31-32.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 32; and Ansel Adams, "My Camera in the Yosemite Valley," Modern Photography, XIII (January, 1950), 45.

¹¹² Ansel Adams, Camera and Lens (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1958), p. 26.

"literal." If the values in the print represent a definite departure from reality, the photograph tends to function as a free interpretation of the subject.¹¹³

Two photographers working with the same subject material could have an entirely different concept of values. Each might place the subject brightnesses on different parts of the exposure scale. The visualization of a photograph; together with the exposure-meter readings, the placement of values on exposure zones, and the processing of the film and print can all be applied toward the photographer's personal interpretation of a subject.¹¹⁴

The object, in an Ansel Adams photograph, is never transformed into something else. It is always recognizable in terms of what it is; not in terms of what it might become. Furthermore, Adams believes that a truly non-objective photograph can never be achieved, except for the photogram. "No matter how compelling may be the 'departure from reality,'" Adams says, "the subject is always revealed or suggested."¹¹⁵ It may undergo a transformation as to

¹¹³ Ansel Adams, The Negative (New York: Morgan & Lester, 1955), pp. 21, 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

¹¹⁵ Ansel Adams, "Photography as Art," Art in

its size, shape, color, brightness, and surface; because everything in a photograph must be rendered as a two-dimensional shape in varying shades of gray. But, these shapes and tonalities become symbols of reality.¹¹⁶

One of the most important controls, that the photographer can use to interpret the subject, is the viewpoint of the camera. Sometimes a point of view other than the normal results in a departure from reality which may intensify the statement. However, trick camera angles are questionable unless they are related to a valid interpretation of the subject. Even the use of certain types of cameras can form point-of-view habits that may not always be applicable to particular problems. In extreme cases, this can frustrate the expressive capacities of the photographer.¹¹⁷

RESPONSES TO PHOTOGRAPHS

Does the photographer communicate with others, or really just talk to himself? Adams thinks that 95 percent

America, VL (Winter, 1957-1958), 35; and Pollack, The Picture History of Photography, p. 365.

¹¹⁶ Adams, The Negative, p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.; and Adams, Camera and Lens, p. 3.

of contemporary art is simply talking to ourselves. Creative camera vision, along with the appropriate techniques, will allow us to deviate from reality with almost any subject material. True communication requires more than just creating an image in the mind's eye, and then producing it as a print. No matter what this image means to the photographer, it does not have essential value unless it enables the spectator to comprehend the realities of the world and of the spirit.¹¹⁸

An Approach to Exploring a Photograph

A photograph is different from an event or a physical object. Its inner meaning, or emotional content, cannot be defined in factual terms. To make matters worse, it is practically impossible to remember moods and emotional impressions. However, if the spectator can recall the details of form, line, and tone in the photograph, he will derive a considerable amount of information from the picture.¹¹⁹

Every individual will have his own personal approach to exploring a photograph. There is no rigid, systematic method. However, Adams points out that the photograph can

¹¹⁸Letter from Ansel Adams to the writer, dated at Los Angeles, California, October 25, 1966.

¹¹⁹Ansel Adams, "Exploring a Photograph," U.S. Camera, VII, 2 (March, 1944), 31.

reveal a great deal more than the external form of an object. Interpretive exaggeration begins where straight realism leaves off. He writes:

. . . It is obvious that the photograph does not duplicate Nature, it only symbolizes it. In looking at a photograph, therefore, we grasp symbolic or emotional impressions, and the power of these impressions is augmented by their inter-relationships. . . .¹²⁰

Adams feels that if the spectator perceives the emotional meaning of the tonal values that are created by the photographer, he will understand what the photographer desires to convey. In addition, exploring a photograph helps sharpen our sensitivity to picture content and relationships. The elements of a photograph help us to create impressions within ourselves. The original subject can be visualized and recreated from a photograph, or we can visualize what we would have done with the subject had we made the photograph.¹²¹

When we explore a photograph, we should try to understand what the creative intention of the photographer was. Whatever is included in a photograph should have significance. Perception and awareness, on the part of the spectator, will enable him to perceive meaning from details that seem insignificant. Occasionally, forms may be without literal meaning;

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 55.

but beautiful in their balance of form, texture, and mass. If they are aesthetically pleasing, they can be enjoyed in and of themselves.¹²²

Verbalization

The photographic image can stand alone without a verbalized interpretation. Too much verbalization might result in a distortion of what the photograph communicates, or a criticism about the objectives of the photographer.¹²³

Adams believes that what we see in a photograph is a private affair. Our reactions to a photograph should be discussed only if we wish to do so. However, it is important to keep our feelings intact for expression through photography. "In my opinion," writes Adams, "demanding a student reveal himself through verbalized symbols and reactions borders dangerously on psychoanalysis."¹²⁴ To think of an image, as a glorified Rorschach test, is not a part of Adams' teaching philosophy. He feels that the aesthetic-emotional reaction to a photograph is such a personal reaction, that to verbalize

¹²² Ibid., p. 57; Ansel Adams, "Architectural Photography," The Encyclopedia of Photography (1963), II, 238; and Adams, "Exploring the Commonplace," VII, 53.

¹²³ Ansel Adams and others, "The Workshop Idea in Photography," Aperture, IX, 4 (1961), 160-62.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

upon it can, in some cases, produce traumatic effects.¹²⁵

When our feelings and reactions are expressed photographically, we need not express them by verbalizing about our photographs. They are in the print for all to read. The perception and awareness of the spectator should allow him to understand the creative intentions of the photographer. If the spectator has visual awareness, he will be able to perceive meaning from the photograph. If the photographer has creative vision, and an adequate technique, he will be able to express himself photographically. If the photographer understands humanity as well, he may be able to say something of importance.¹²⁶

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Ibid.; statement by Beaumont Newhall during a tape recorded lecture on Ansel Adams, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 22, 1966; Adams, "Exploring a Photograph," VII, 57; and a letter from Ansel Adams to the writer, October 25, 1966.

Chapter 5

THE THEORIES OF MINOR WHITE

Conscious photography connects the technical process to the creative process. It is a state of awareness between people and things--it is possible when there is inner growth and a mastery over the craft. Learning to photograph in this manner requires a determined effort to observe the creative process in one's emotional self. At first, all attention must be given to the human creative process rather than to the success or failure of the photographs. "Do not look for pictures," says White, "look at the subject until it is understood by a conscious you."¹ When the creative process is absorbed, there will be more successful photographs than failures. There will be a merging of the creative process and successful photography.²

PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN ART FORM

Everyone has formless ideas arising in them. Those

¹Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), I, 4-6.

²Ibid., p. 7.

with creative ability or talent can give them form. Some people, however, seem to remain unaware of these ideas stirring in themselves until they see an already formed, or partly formed, manifestation of it. Photography seems to fit the kind of person remarkably well who does not know, feel, or sense that an idea is stirring within him until he stumbles upon a manifestation of it in front of his camera. Stieglitz stated this phenomenon when he said: "I do not understand anything until I have a photograph of it."; and Weston probably meant the same with his phrase, "the flame of recognition."³

The Creative Cycle

Creative work, for most people, has tides. There is a time to create, and a time to study. When the tide is out, the time is appropriate to study, to do exercises, and to read about photography and its related fields of art and human relations. When the tide comes in again, one has a new knowledge to apply to the creative force surge. To many photographers, the danger comes when the tide runs out:

. . . If they have not learned creative discipline, or have no instinct to study and do exercises when the tide is out, they slow down,

³ Ibid., p. 15.

then stop photographing, and wonder what happened all the rest of their lives.⁴

Photographs Function as Symbols

Photographs are symbols of life experiences. We may look at a face and see a deeper truth, that lies beneath the surface. This inner image, replaces in our mind, the mask that the person presents. This can occur without a change of expression. When a trained intuition is at work, the facial mask becomes transparent. The inner image seems to "swim" to the surface and the perceptive photographer is invariably influenced.⁵

The Creative Artist and Photography

Photography, used as a fine art, is what any artist makes of it. For the analytical artist, photography is a tool to record his visual curiosity, his visual understanding, and his visual contemplation of the world. For the objective artist, photography can reveal the meanings of things and render surfaces with love and beauty. The subjective artist can use photography as a means of self-expression--simply by dissociating the subject from its connotations. When photography

⁴Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁵Minor White, Zone System Manual (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1961), p. 99.

is used in this manner, the unconscious mind can be reached through the reading of the photograph's design. Discarding the connotations of subjects leaves them symbols that can be read like dreams. The world of the unconscious mind is turned into the raw material of art.⁶

The Four Broad Classes of Photography

We may think of photography in terms of four broad classifications of photographs--the Informational, the Documentary or Reportage, the Pictorial, and the Equivalent.

The Informational classification covers special purpose recording, but basically it is a photograph that says: This is it and this is the way the camera saw it. The main purpose of the informational photograph is to inform the mind. Pictures which explain, instruct, report, or acquaint the mind are informational photographs. Reading such a photograph depends a great deal on having a specialized knowledge of the subject.⁷

The Documentary or Reportage photograph acts as a bridge to experience, taking the viewer to the original event,

⁶Minor White, "What Is Photography?," Photo Notes (Spring, 1950), p. 16.

⁷Minor White and Walter Chappell, "Some Methods for Experiencing Photographs," Aperture, V, 4 (1957), 160-61.

place or time. There is a bridge in time and space between the event and the spectator. The photographer attempts to report, yet leave himself out.

The photograph is a splendid device for holding a transitory instant still long enough to look at it in leisure. One can read character lines in a face; or clues of costume, gesture, or geography from an event. Both the natural scene and the social scene can be documented.

The documentary photograph allows the photographer to show relationships and the nature of those relationships. The photographer may choose to relate the subject to its background or he may choose not to.

The documentary photograph can provide information about a person, place, event, or a relationship between people. If the photograph is primarily of one person, it may hold clues about the sex, nationality, race, occupation, marriage status, mental state, or the type of person you are looking at. If the photograph is of two or more people, it may show the relationships between the people as well as their gestures and costumes. If the photograph is of an event, it may reveal the action of the participants, and the atmosphere or mood surrounding the event. If the photograph is of a place, it may show: who just left, how long ago, when they

will return, and what the social strata and atmosphere are. The documentary photograph says: This is it and this is the way I saw it.⁸

The pictorialist, says in effect: This is what I saw and here is how I feel about it. The Pictorial photograph uses the graphics of the medium and the photographer's style to augment the content of the photograph. Everything in the photograph contributes something to the total meaning of the picture.

. . . The pictorialist is less concerned with the subject than the picture it will yield. He uses the camera not so much to record as to stress how he sees. This definition includes: the salon pictorialists, the pure photographers, the subjectivists, the modernists, and the future schools and individuals who seek to make manner as important as subject matter.⁹

White and Chappell define the Equivalent in the same manner as Stieglitz did. The Equivalent is a photograph that stands for a feeling that the photographer has had about something. The subject of the photograph acts as a metaphor of that feeling. "Feeling" refers here to the photographer's

⁸ Ibid., pp. 159, 163-64; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

⁹ White and Chappell, "Some Methods for Experiencing Photographs," V, 160.

notion of the inner nature of the subject. In the Equivalent, no attempt is made to imitate the outer features of the original subject.¹⁰

Occasionally, photographs can transcend categories. Informational photographs can be aesthetic, documentary photographs can transcend their subject matter, and pictorial photographs can transcend both subject matter and style.¹¹

PHOTOGRAPHIC CONCEPTS

Concepts About Light

The photographer can become so concerned with light from an exposure point of view that he forgets about light as a presence in his photographs. The spectator is not concerned with exposure, but the presence of light in a photograph has an emotional effect upon him. To the spectator, it becomes very important what kind of light is present. He is aware of a light that glows as opposed to a light that falls on objects and casts shadows. The revealing light of an overcast day creates a different feeling than a directional light, such as sunlight, which casts shadows and evokes warmth.¹²

There is no such thing as a good or bad light.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 161. ¹¹Ibid., p. 158.

¹²White, "Conscious Photography," I, 97-98.

Photographers, however, vary in regard to how closely they observe the qualities of light. Shape and form may be destroyed by shadows. Where light appears to come from, within the photograph, is very important. The proper lighting can evoke the desired emotional response in the spectator, and if the photographer understands the emotional qualities of light, he will be in a better position to control the response.¹³

Directional Light is useful because sometimes shadow intensifies a shape. When the lighting is directional in nature, most of the light within the photograph appears to come from the same place.

Revealing Light presents everything there is. It makes us conscious of the object itself, and it creates no blocked-up shadows or highlights. Revealing Light produces emotional responses which come from the object. It seems to envelope, and may produce a feeling of luminosity or mild oppression. With directional lighting, there is an interaction between the light and the object. The emotions of the

¹³ Minor White, "Analysis of Five Prints," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels (New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), p. 33; statement by Minor White during a tape recorded lecture, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 18, 1965; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

spectator will react both to the object and the light.

There is generally a single light source, but there may also be a weak fill-in light.

Light As A Source creates an awareness of light itself. The light source may be in the picture, but this is not always the case. The light source seems to become a part of the light. This lighting is intense and dramatic.

Internal Light is a strange type of lighting where there appears to be a play of light within the object itself. The light appears to glow, and it produces a mystical, other-worldliness type of feeling.

Play of Light is the name given to a kind of light that lies outside the picture; and plays on objects, with objects, or creates dancing shadows.¹⁴

Concepts About Space

The sense of three dimensional space, which we sense in a photograph, is an illusion; nevertheless, photographic space affects us emotionally and we respond to it. Space can be primary to the meaning of the photograph.¹⁵

¹⁴White, "Conscious Photography," II, 185; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

¹⁵White, "Conscious Photography," I, 95; and Minor White, "The Use of Space in Designing Pictures," The American

Limited Space creates the feeling of intimacy or confinement; sometimes, a mixture of both. It can suggest: closeness, comfort, intimacy, tightness, imprisonment, or a feeling of claustrophobia. Sometimes, however, the feelings of limited space that are experienced in a photograph come more from other elements present in the picture than from sensations of space.

Moderately Deep Space or Medium Space creates a feeling of comfort. Space seems to expand somewhat within the photograph.

Deep Space or Far Space suggests distance, remoteness, loneliness, wonder, or a nostalgic feeling about space. It can be achieved by: (1) using both near and far objects within the photograph, (2) the use of the ground plane seen from near to far, and (3) the use of the inclined plane of both ground and sky.¹⁶

White uses the concepts of Planemetric Space and Recessional Space to explain how movement into space is

Annual of Photography (Minneapolis: Jones Press, Inc., 1951), p. 111.

¹⁶White, "The Use of Space in Designing Pictures," p. 111; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

accomplished. When the planes in the photograph are parallel to the picture plane, the situation is called Planemetric. When the planes in the picture are diagonal to the picture plane, the situation is called recessional. These names come from Heinrich Wolfflin's book, Principles of Art History.

Recessional Space is more dynamic and has a feeling of faster movement than Planemetric Space. Recessional Space seems to lead us into the picture; Planemetric Space seems to block us out of the picture.¹⁷

When we speak about planes in a photograph, it is important to remember that planes are not always solid. Planes can be perforated, as is the case with screen doors, fences, and windows. Some planes are implied, for example, a row of objects going over a hill. A plane can be nothing more than a thin row of trees on the edge of a pond.¹⁸

There are occasions when the monocular vision of the camera affects the rendering of depth. Space can be collapsed or telescoped. When space is telescoped, the various planes

¹⁷White, "Conscious Photography," I, 96; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

¹⁸White, "Conscious Photography," I, 97; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

within the photograph come together even though in reality they are apart.¹⁹

If there is no way of telling the size of the area shown in a photograph, and if a part of the subject is not oriented to the rest of the subject, the subject may appear to shift in space from near to far. Parts pop in and out, or fluctuate within space. Fluctuating Space lacks both the intimate feeling of Limited Space and the nostalgia of Deep Space. It produces a kind of strange, shifting, insecure feeling of the viewer.²⁰

Concepts About Form

Openness and closedness are feeling states that we encounter daily. Every photograph that we see has some kind of relationship to openness and closedness. Open Form is identified by the incompleteness of all or most of the objects seen--heads cut in half, parts of cars, etc. Closed Form exhibits all of the objects complete--whole heads, or whole bodies, or all of a car. It isolates a fragment of reality

¹⁹White, "The Use of Space in Designing Pictures," p. 111; White, "Conscious Photography," I, 97; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

²⁰White, "The Use of Space in Designing Pictures," pp. 107-08.

and evokes the sensation of completeness within the picture.²¹

In Closed Form, the directions are parallel to the edges of the picture. They are either horizontal, vertical, or both horizontal and vertical. Closed Form shows the major subject entirely within the frame. It seems to isolate the subject from the world and impose some sort of man-made order upon it. It may be too static. It produces an awareness of order, solidity, and classic stability. This kind of a photograph should be provided with a wide border and framed. There is a feeling that a little world lives an independent existence within the picture frame.²²

In Open Form, the major directions within the picture area are at an angle, not parallel, to the format. The directions are diagonal, circular, or curved. The form is cut by the frame, and not all of the subject is enclosed. The subjects may consist of parts rather than total entities. Open Form gives the suggestion that something is going on outside or beyond the picture area. There is an emotional implication of cutting. At times, it may be too chaotic. Open

²¹White, "Conscious Photography," I, 92-93.

²²Ibid.; White, "Analysis of Five Prints," p. 33; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

Form is indicative of our own period. It provides an awareness of the romantic, the spontaneous, disorder, and instability. This kind of a photograph requires as little isolation as possible, and is effective with bleed mounting. Open Form gives the feeling that the photograph is a window onto the objective world.²³

Concepts About Tone

The tonal distribution within a photograph has an emotional effect upon the spectator. Tones may augment the statement, soften or tone down the statement, or produce a second statement. Contrast, for example, augments the dynamic. Low contrast suggests passivity.

The dark tones seem gloomy, morbid, heavy, or suggest heavy oppression, night, weight, death, and desolation. The middle grays suggest reality but are not necessarily uninteresting. The light tones suggest another worldly type of feeling. They are used a great deal in fashion photography, and have an ethereal, floating quality. These tones are exciting, but they are sometimes associated with artificiality.²⁴

²³Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

²⁴Ibid.

Concepts About Value Patterns

The light, middle, and dark value patterns will not always conform to the shape of the objects. They may set up a somewhat different pattern and consequently the effect will be different. This does not occur frequently, but when it does occur a hidden source of evocation may erupt.

The shape of the dark pattern can sometimes be controlled by exposure. The shape of the light pattern can often be controlled by altering the development time. The middle value pattern can rarely be controlled. It is important to be aware of the fact, that sometimes the value patterns of the subject cannot be altered by exposure and development. Sometimes they can only be altered by changes in the camera viewpoint. The photographer should be aware of the various value patterns in the subject, because they will be present in the image and have a subtle evocative power. What the value patterns of a photograph evoke in the spectator, may or may not be the same as what the subject evokes.²⁵

Concepts About Objects

The size of objects in the photograph affects the spectator in still other ways. Large objects, that take up

²⁵White, "Conscious Photography," I, 75-76.

most of the picture area, seem monumental, overpowering, and uncomfortable. Medium size objects suggest reality and a feeling of comfort. Small, spotty objects make us feel nervousness and suggest busyness.²⁶

The photographer must be concerned with negative space or the shape between two objects. Sometimes, the shape of the negative space suggests a third object. Painters and artists are very much aware of negative space. In photography, it is rarely possible to deliberately use negative space. The photographer, however, needs to be aware of the shapes that negative space creates or his images may reveal things that everyone sees but himself.²⁷

Concepts About Balance

If the basic structure works, the photograph will work. Diverse elements can be put into the same area and pulled together, if a photograph balances.

In a photograph, tensions are built up by directions and weight. The closeness or proximity of objects builds up

²⁶Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

²⁷White, "Conscious Photography," I, 91.

more tension than when objects or lines actually meet. If the directions within a photograph do not balance, tension is of primary importance and it must be considered. Tensions, within a photograph, may be resolved by: (1) directions which are opposite and equal, (2) directions which oppose one another at right angles, (3) directions which oppose at other than right angles, (4) directions which meet, and (5) space that absorbs weight or direction.²⁸

The size, tone, or color of objects may affect their apparent weight. A black mass may feel heavier than a light colored one. As a general rule, the size of an object affects its apparent weight, but this is not always the case. Large forms seem to have less weight than a collection of little ones.²⁹

Balance can be created by both nature and man. It may be purely psychological, such as the feeling that we are able to escape to one side within a photograph. But, if it is not psychological in nature, it can be classified according to type. White defines three primary types of balance: Formal, Assymmetrical (Informal), and Intuitive or Occult Balance.

²⁸ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

²⁹ Ibid.

Intuitive Balance, or Occult Balance, is subtle and intuitive. It indicates the movement of action, whereas if the design is formal or symmetrical it indicates the movement of standing still. In Occult Balance, unlike parts are arranged around a balancing point, and they hold the total in equilibrium by their pull.³⁰

Concepts About Layout

Layout is the relationship of photographs to a page. The single photograph may be presented in a great variety of ways. Where the photograph should be placed depends upon the photograph itself and its use once it is mounted up.

The best layout is made by looking at the photograph first. A photograph with direction may be used as a device to give direction, especially in exhibitions. Two photos, both pulling toward the main body of photographs, may serve as an end of phrase in exhibitions. An end of paragraph may be achieved by two photos with opposite directions.³¹

Photographs may be balanced by a play of directions. The method that should be used depends upon whether the form of the photographs is Open or Closed and whether the balance

³⁰ Ibid.; and White, "Conscious Photography," I, 95.

³¹ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

is Formal or Occult. Closed Form stands isolation by the mount best. This kind of a photograph seems to fit better if it is well centered. Open Form photographs lend themselves to a great variety of layout. What goes on in the photograph must be considered, but there are two principle types of balancing that may be used: Mirror images where photo A is placed opposite photo A¹ and X-Type where similar photos are placed in opposite corners.³²

The terms Formal Balance and Occult Balance apply to layout as well as to the type of balance within a photograph. Formal Balance includes the single photograph centered, mirror image, x-variety, and tic-tac-toe type varieties. Informal Balance or Occult is achieved by the effect, weight, and directions in a given area. Color also may be used.³³

Directions can be balanced by: (1) absorption, where space uses up energy; (2) counter direction, where the direction of one photograph is offset by the directional pull of another; and (3) right angle direction, where the directional pull of one photograph is opposed by the directional pull of another photograph which is at a right angle to it. If the main direction of the photograph is from left to right, and the photograph is to be balanced by absorption, the photograph

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

can be mounted on the left side of the mount with text or space absorbing the space to the photo's right. If the photograph is to be balanced by a second photo, which has a directional pull in the opposite direction, we may choose to use the second photo with the first in some kind of X-Type or Mirror Image layout.³⁴

Weight may be used to balance a layout just as it may be used to balance a single photograph. Dark photographs seem heavier than light ones, and a small photograph that has predominantly white or black areas will balance a larger photograph that has predominantly gray areas. A large dark photograph may be balanced by a small light one.³⁵

Concepts About Exhibitions and Displays

An exhibition or display is a logical step that begins with a capricious shifting of prints on a table and ends with a controlled "montage" on a panel or wall. The organization of the prints can be worked out, but there is a tendency for the prints to take over and develop their own pattern. The first phase is one of exploration and discovery. What is the total statement that a group of photographs make when they are treated as a "montage"? The interplay of prints is not

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

only left to right and right to left, but top to bottom, bottom to top, and diagonally.

White calls the next step a "free montage" phase:

. . . This can be described as a configuration caused by prints that touch, but not necessarily the full lengths of their sides. Lines in one print lead into lines of the next and cause the prints to proliferate freely like the unpredictable configurations of a game of dominoes.³⁶

This seems to be one of the most appropriate ways of displaying miniature camera prints.

Another part of the display phase is the exploration of audience participation and response. The spectator will see new statements and connotations that the photographer never noticed. The print on display is not so much a bridge between the spectator and photographer as it is a starting point for the spectator's independent imagination.³⁷

Exhibitions may be one man shows, group shows, or theme shows. The layout for a one man show depends upon the photographs available, and the space in which you have to work. The quantity of images can be as important as the

³⁶Minor White, "Exploratory Camera," Aperture, I, 1 (1952), 14-15.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 15.

individual images themselves.³⁸

White feels that directional variety and effective placement of the photographs are the most important things to consider in an exhibition. All of the photographs, that are available for an exhibition, will not be of the same high intensity; but low intensity photographs may be used to build up the high intensity photographs.

If the photographer did not work in sequences, a simple placement of the photographs would be required. The photographs can be placed in groups by categories. Group 1, for example, might consist of portraits, Group 2 could be nudes, Group 3 might be rocks, and Group 4 might be landscapes. If the photographs are mixed, the spectator will get the feeling that he has seen the show before; but when they are presented in this manner, he will feel that he must go on to see the entire show.³⁹

The show can be set up with each panel repeating the other panel or with each panel having a character of its own. If the panels have overlapping tonalities, the spectator will get the feeling that if he has seen one he has seen them all.

³⁸ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

³⁹ Ibid.

All shows have their limitations as to the space, money, and material available. There are sometimes reasons why certain work appears. Sometimes, it is necessary to have everyone represented in a class show. Sometimes, it is necessary to include prints that lend variety. In one man shows, the important questions are: Have you selected a representative group of work and have you selected the best of it? When you start putting the work together on the wall, the wall arrangement will quite often determine the necessity of selecting some of the rejected photographs.

Some shows are group efforts--some are individual efforts. One person should be in charge in group efforts to expedite matters. Big exhibitions cannot be done by one person. A little show of 50-100 prints can be done by one person if he has the help of someone to put the prints up where he tells them to put them. There are no hard and fast rules.⁴⁰

The Classicist-Romanticist Concept

The Classicist sticks to the unique characteristics of the medium. The Classicist attitude produces an intellectual

⁴⁰ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 15, 1962.

order. Academic rules are important--the arrangements and balances are formal. The art that it produces provide an intellectual pleasure, and its structures are to be admired. It deals primarily with things as they are, but includes things underneath the surface also. The Classicistic concepts include: Revealing or Directional Light, Near Planimetric Space, and Closed Form. The photograph generally consists of a few simple elements and these objects are photographed for what they are rather than for what else they might become.⁴¹

The Romanticist explores the potentials of the medium. All restrictions are thrown to the winds. The Romantic attitude is one of emotional logic and sentimentality. The Romanticist concepts are: Internal Light, Light as a Source, Far Transitional Space, and Open Form. The photograph generally consists of many complex elements which are generally photographed for what else they are.⁴²

⁴¹Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

⁴²Minor White, "Pictorial Photography," The Encyclopedia of Photography (1964), XV, 2872; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

The Concept of Essence

There are two concepts that lie at the heart of unique photography. The concept of essence is one, the concept of experience is the other.

. . . Essence refers to that underlying strata of meaning from which all secondary characteristics radiate. Hence it is the core, the heart, the central motive, in short the essence of a person, place, event, or gesture from which the whole of person, place or event may be reconstructed.⁴³

To reach essence, the photographer cannot work as the painter does. The photographer cannot pile up characteristics until an essence is synthesized, he must wait until a face, gesture, or place goes "transparent" and thereby reveals the essence underneath. This exact instant, when the subject bares its inner core is a transitory and fleeting moment. It is never repeated exactly. The expressive function of the camera is to make photographs that reveal the essence of the subject along with the facts.⁴⁴

It is difficult to photograph essence. Essence photographs are rare because only rarely can the photographer put himself in place of something else and at the same time

⁴³ Minor White, "Lyrical and Accurate," Image, V, 8 (October, 1956), 177.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; and Minor White, "Photography Is an Art," Design, XLIX, 4 (December, 1947), 6.

be aware of himself or his own existence.

The photographer should be aware of what he projects when he photographs. It is possible to project oneself onto the subject without being aware of it. White states that there are five "bodies" from which we can project:

. . . Our body of associations, "this reminds me of a picture I saw before;" our body of ideas and concepts, "this fits into type C or class 2 or form 6;" our kinesthetic body, "my hand and fingers sympathize;" our emotional body, "out of my emotional repertoire this stirs my feelings of love;" our intuitive body, which most of us know so little about. . . .⁴⁵

We can project from any of these bodies or parts of them. The only thing that is not a projection is the essence of some thing or someone else.

Essence and the Dominant Image

The dominant image photographer believes that in the right light surfaces will reveal the inner meaning of the subject. He believes that every subject inherently contains one photographic image which can reveal the facts of the place, person, situation, or object--and when the light is right, some of the emotional feeling. The photographer whose attitude is primarily "dominant" assumes that every subject has a

⁴⁵ Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), I, 69-70.

dominant image.⁴⁶

White explains the difference between Essence and Dominant Image as a difference in the relationship to facts:

. . . In making Dominant Images the photographer when he must will sacrifice feeling to keep the unmistakable likeness--truth to facts. The photographer with Essence on his mind will distort the facts if there is no other way to crystallize essence. Essence points at the uniqueness of the place, situation, person or thing. Consequently, more often than not, some fractions--some part--will crystallize the whole of which is a blob. That part standing for the whole.⁴⁷

Essence belongs to the object and not to the photographer. After a period of time, however, the fascination with objective essences can turn into introspection. If this happens, the photographer may recognize that there is a kind of "chemical" union of himself with a place, person, situation, or thing.

The Dominant Image and Essence Image are both concerned with Things For What They Are. With the Essence Image, the photographer tries to work from the intuitive or sensed reality of the subject. In both types of images, the attitude of the photographer is to find the wonder and revelation of a subject through the direct experience of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 180-81

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 184.

"thing for what it is."⁴⁸

The Concept of Experience

Experience refers to that part of an event, place, situation, or person that may be shared with others by means of the photograph. Edward Weston evokes the experience of beauty in his photographs, Ansel Adams evokes the experience of goodness, W. Eugene Smith evokes the experience of truth, Alfred Stieglitz evokes the experience of transcendence, and Ruth Bernhard evokes the experience of the mystical.⁴⁹

The Concept of Experience is a useful concept when trying to come at the problem of a particular photograph's relation to a work of art, because it allows a direct approach to the photograph itself. If the photograph evokes the experience of beauty, truth, or goodness or what the spectator associates with the aesthetic experience, then the photograph fulfills one of the functions of a work of art.⁵⁰

Concepts About Portraiture

The duration of a portrait session should be one of growing rapport and deepening friendship. The subject and

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 186-88.

⁴⁹ White, "Lyrical and Accurate," V, 178-79.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

the photographer create in one another, and the camera is hardly more than a recording device for an experience between two people.⁵¹

If the photographer loses himself in the individual he is photographing, the subject can sometimes very readily take the situation over. Instead of the photographer getting the kind of photograph he wants, he will get what the subject, somehow or other, accidentally gives him. This may or may not be better than what he wanted. The photographer may have to talk, suggest, play music, or act in order to make the subject reveal himself.

Through imitation, the subject will be more likely to be what you want, if you are what you want him to be.

. . . Part of trying to be what you want the individual to be is going to be physical. By non-verbal direction, you at least have to move your body in such a way that the person who is responding is going to come with you. . . . The photographer can oversmile, overact and overdo things because the individual in front of you is not likely to respond enough if you don't overact. Or the other way around, you may have to underplay it thoroughly because they respond too fast. . . . Even if you don't know what your face is looking like you can wiggle it all over the place until you get the

⁵¹ Minor White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 167.

expression you want.⁵²

The subject of a portrait is not unlike an actor or a dancer. He needs to get a correlation between what he looks like on the outside and what it feels like to him. If he can do this, he will be able to convey the visual image that he desires.⁵³

Portraiture is commonly thought of as a pleasing likeness but it should be a penetration of character. It should reveal the uniqueness of the individual. The portrait photographer should ask himself: What makes this person different from another? and What are the essential characteristics of this person? The inner personality of the individual must come through if you are trying to show him as he is. If you impose your own personality on the subject, you are revealing what else he is.

The fight against camera consciousness goes on always. People ignore, ask questions, show suspicion, mug, and play dead. This is not usually what the photographer wants. He wants intimacy, friendliness, the essence of the inner

⁵²Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 15, 1962.

⁵³Ibid.

person, or the individuality of the person.⁵⁴

Many portrait subjects wish to be flattered, but flattery must be done in a deep manner. Technical tricks to achieve flattery, such as soft focus and retouching, are a superficial means of handling the problem. Instead, the person should be given the best the photographer has in himself. This type of flattery doesn't depend on negative retouching or soft focus lenses. By direction, the photographer should attempt to bring the best of the individual out on his face. The reason that many photographers photograph only the great or the beautiful is because these people do not require flattery. They may be done as they are.⁵⁵

People may imitate pictures they have seen, or bear resentment. They put up a mask when they are photographed. To remedy this situation, photograph children or people who don't care. Otherwise, there are two ways to handle this type of subject: to work unobtrusively, or to make an environmental portrait where the person is revealed through the background. A background may have importance, with the subject responding to its importance. Elements may be used to give

⁵⁴Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

⁵⁵Ibid.

secondary meaning through symbolism: Specks in the background hint at stars or infinity while lighter planes above another may indicate something beyond.⁵⁶

A single picture can only be a fraction of the subject's personality, although essential fractions of the subject's personality can make up a collective portrait. The photographer's personality enters in also. Certain qualities of the photographer, such as strength or poignancy, are intentionally or unintentionally transmitted to the portrait. The trained photographer should either leave himself in as much as possible or out as much as possible.

For truth in portraiture, we should see the individual. In extremely honest portraiture, a portrait photographer must show the sitter and leave himself out. In the case of Karsh, the powerful photograph has become a landmark. The question is: Does what you see in the portrait belong exclusively to the sitter?⁵⁷

The length of exposure is in relation to the amount of personality that can be captured in a given length of

⁵⁶ Ibid.; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

⁵⁷ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

time--minutes, 1 minute, 1 second, or 1/5000th of a second. Although some people don't respond to one type of exposure or the other, slightly more personality may come out in longer exposures, and slightly more spontaneity may be achieved through strobe. Short exposures are suited to the spontaneous or transitory whereas more of the personality shows in long exposures. Today the photographer has complete control over exposure.⁵⁸

There are three layers of truth which the portrait may reveal: surface revelation, the outer and inner character of the person, and that aspect of the individual which is normally kept to oneself. Surface truth is concerned with outer appearance and the outward truth about the person. Inner truth is concerned with expressions and characteristics about the individual. It penetrates the surface, and goes down to a psychological basis or a state of mind. Sometimes, a state of mind will be revealed when the photographer attempts to reveal the personality of the subject. Character revelation is typical of the informal portrait that shows the uniqueness of a person.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid.; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

⁵⁹ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual

If there is rapport between the photographer and the subject, the feeling that the photographer experiences may come through in a photograph to a spectator. When the subject is interested in something else, a different feeling will exist in the photograph. Even when portraits are made under close scrutiny, things slip in and the photographer may get something different than he intended. Things may be revealed about the individual which they know about, but haven't seen. If psychological revelation is in order, this may be valuable. But, this is only desirable in the informal portrait, not in commercial portraiture.⁶⁰

Concepts About Architectural Photography

The architectural photographer can interpret subject matter or merely record and let the facts speak for themselves. Architectural photography lies between the extremes of personal interpretation and the spirit of the architecture. The personal interpretation must somehow capture the spirit of the architecture, or else the photograph may be an obvious example of interpretation that exceeds the bounds of architectural

Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Winter, 1957.

⁶⁰Ibid.

photography.⁶¹

The architectural photographer should learn to approach his subject with intellectual knowledge and a craftsmanship of feeling. "Knowing where a given example fits in history, or in the economics, or the technical features," writes White, "will help slant the photography. . . ."⁶² The feeling side is direct and wordless--a way of evoking the insight needed to reach the essence of the architecture. The more experience that the photographer has, the better he will know how and when to bring his intellect into play and how and when to let his feelings take over.⁶³

The architectural photographer can emphasize spirit over facts, or facts over spirit. Part of the choice will depend on whether the photographer is basically a Romanticist or a Classicist, however, the choice should depend on the style of architecture that we are dealing with. Classical, if the architecture is Classical or Gothic; Romantic, perhaps, if dealing with Baroque or Modern.

⁶¹Minor White, "Substance and Spirit of Architectural Photography," Aperture, VI, 4 (1958), 159-60; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

⁶²White, "Substance and Spirit of Architectural Photography," VI, 147.

⁶³Ibid.

The Classicist-Romanticist concepts can be extended to architectural photography. Classical or Gothic architecture, for example, can be photographed with Revealing Light, Planemetric Space, Closed Form, and in the manner of Things As They Are. Baroque or Modern architecture can be photographed in the manner of Things As They Become, using Recessional Space, Open Form, and light that is a Source, Internal, or Direct. In one sense, the interpretive mode may be thought of as Romanticistic; and the things-speak-for-themselves mode is Classicistic. The professional photographer must be able to evoke the spirit of the Romanticistic or Classicistic mode with equal competence. He may be asked to photograph Gothic architecture one day and a Greek revival house the next. To do this, he must learn a craftsmanship of feeling by which he can expand his own temperament as far as possible.⁶⁴

The photographer should be around the architecture awhile and should be aware of its influence before starting to photograph. Architecture has evidence of the architect, the inhabitants, and the building itself. The photographer must be aware of these and somehow interpret them. One

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 160-67; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

approach that can be used is direct and emotional, the other is indirect and intellectual. The direct and emotional approach requires the photographer to come face to face with the building. Any building has spirit of some kind. The direct approach requires concentration, observation, and the feel of the building. The indirect and intellectual approach requires research of the architect's ideas, trends, and styles, etc. It requires a study of architecture, what architects have to say, and a study of architectural photographs.⁶⁵

Whatever is characteristic of the architecture--space, form and function, or design--should be brought out and emphasized in the photograph. The photographer should not intrude between the spectator and the architecture. The problem is to avoid a dull unimaginative rendering, and at the same time avoid a personal rendering which expresses something else. The photographer should ask himself: What is the purpose of the building and what is the aim of the architect? Above all else, the architectural photographer must have faith that surfaces can reveal inner states.⁶⁶

⁶⁵Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

⁶⁶White, "Substance and Spirit of Architectural Photography," VI, 143, 164; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

Concepts About Commercial Photography

In commercial photography, it is essential to eliminate all ideas which do not apply to the meaning of the photograph. One way to emphasize a subject is to use Open Form with parts of things, to emphasize a Closed Form subject in the center.

Advertising photographs are concerned with the essences of things; the inner qualities of things as well as surface characteristics. The advertising photographer must present some essential underlying quality of the subject.⁶⁷

Concepts About the Camera

The view camera allows the creative artist to observe and to contemplate the world. The hand camera allows the artist to participate in events as fast as they happen. ". . . With the view camera he slowly distills; with the hand camera he rapidly acts in action, taking part while probing with it, penetrating with it to whatever truth he can understand."⁶⁸

White has a concept for the view camera, which he calls: Isolation of a Completed Experience. The view camera virtually lifts some visual experience out of the world and makes it a new one for the spectator to experience from the

⁶⁷ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

⁶⁸ Minor White, "What Is Photography?," Photo Notes, Spring, 1950, p. 16.

print. The miniature camera tends to make the photographer feel that he is a part of the world, and taking part in the activity of people. The photograph is a remembered image made visible. When the spectator looks at this, he takes part in the photographer's participation.⁶⁹

The physical construction of each camera determines the seeing of the photographer. The tripod bound view camera functions best in situations in which there is time and place to set it up. There must be time to compose at leisure, and to solve the subject's problems of exposure and mood content. View camera work allows the photographer time to fully experience what is seen. There is time to become emotionally involved with the subject and to understand it while you are looking.⁷⁰

There is a beginning, middle, and end to the reaction. A sense of completion is characteristic of view camera work and the print must serve the spectator as a complete experience. The sheet film feature makes it possible to treat each negative individually and to control the contrast of each individual negative.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Minor White, "How Concepts Differ for Two Cameras," American Photography, XLV, 9 (September, 1951), 548.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The miniature camera allows photographing and being photographed to become a natural relationship between people. It is almost as though the photographer has suddenly become transparent. Since there is no need to experience a picture while exposing, the photographer can experience the event. The photographer is free to lose himself in what is happening--he is free to become involved in any experience he can see. It is possible to photograph in a state of high tension and excitement, and at the same time be extremely sensitive. The photographer experiences the moods of tragedy, comedy, love, or hate after the event. In typical miniature camera work, the photographer sees and participates in the event simultaneously; he experiences the event during the printing stage.⁷²

Seeing can be so fast that there is no experience, only a recognition that something important is taking place. There is no more than a sensing that something significant is happening without having the least idea of what the significance is. The photographer does not have to judge, criticize, evaluate or experience at the time of exposure. The "explored negative" technique lets him experience in the

⁷² Ibid., pp. 550-51.

leisure of printing what he sensed at the time of exposure.⁷³

The high maneuverability of the small camera permits it to be used spontaneously. It speeds up seeing by: allowing seeing to be incomplete prior to exposure, and by eliminating elaborate exposure studies. In practice, meter readings and exposure-development ratios are made once at the beginning of a shooting period.

Roll film makes development the same for every negative. Consequently, the exposure must be adjusted to one developing time. Contrast control through the control of exposure and development is limited, and must be divided between the negative development and printing processes.

. . . The creative activity of the photographer is largely forced to be divided between seeing and printing. He is forced from the positive knowledge of "previsualization" to the not-so-positive situation of "exploration." . . .⁷⁴

The negative is used as a new source of experience. What the photographer sees, at the moment of exposure, is not considered final. It is a preliminary step or a kind of sketch with implications which are intensified in printing.⁷⁵

The ideal negative for the miniature camera should contain printable detail throughout from the lowest to

⁷³ Ibid., p. 551. ⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 549-50. ⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 550.

highest light reflectances.

. . . From such a negative a routine of printing high key, low key, over, under, and normal scale will uncover all the possibilities inherent in the negative. Not only are the accidental tone relations explored, but also, by cropping, the various formal possibilities. . . .⁷⁶

The accidents of seeing, which were not seen at the moment of exposure, are investigated at leisure. Then out of all the various print statements that can be made by exploring one negative, the photographer can select the one that fits his mood at the time of printing. This is in complete contrast to the view camera work, where the photographer forces out of the negative what he remembers was put into it.⁷⁷

The final print statement may be different from the photographer's original mood, but if he is willing to accept full responsibility that the statement made is one he can make, then the work has creative validity. If the photographer lets the accident lead him into making statements that are false to himself, the whole work is of no significance.⁷⁸

The view camera and the miniature camera need to be fully exploited for their own unique possibilities. The

⁷⁶White, "How Concepts Differ for Two Cameras," XLV, 548.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

rationale or working method for the miniature camera is one of discovery and of using the accidental intelligently. The Exposure-Development Phase is affected by three concepts: prolific exposures which make working by the roll both feasible and valid; rapid exposures, which let seeing and exposure nearly coincide; and negative control.

In view camera technique, all control of seeing is localized in the negative. Printing is a mechanical materialization of the remembered image. In miniature camera technique, the photographer's control is only started in the negative--it must be completed in printing.⁷⁹

The Printing Phase is affected by the concept and rationale of the camera. In view camera work, the negative is made to contain one unique statement. In miniature camera work, it is thought to contain more than one. A full exploration of the negative is necessary in order to find these statements, and so the negative is submitted to tonal alterations, cropping, and size variations on the enlarger. "This exploration," says White, "is for new possibilities, for things not seen or even thought of at the time of exposure or before. . . ."⁸⁰ The camera is used as a research tool to

⁷⁹Minor White, "Exploratory Camera," Aperture, I, 1 (1952), 5-6.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 6.

bring the accidental into control.

The miniature camera can move all the way around a theme, and penetrate it so readily, that many pictures are available. In this manner, the objective can be given a three-dimensionality that no single photograph can give. Audience participation is an enormous field of exploration for the photographer. Other people can sometimes point out implications of the photographs that the photographer could never see or imagine for himself.⁸¹ The Display-Phase is affected by the participation of the audience and the concept of single prints treated as units of a group.

The Seeing Phase is affected by the kind of camera that is used. The miniature eye-level camera channels the seeing of a man in a different way than either the view camera or waist-level camera. The miniature snatches the instant of revelation, the view camera captures the moment of vision. The one is spontaneous and intuitive, the other is contemplative and gives evidence of ordered thinking. The eye-level miniature is intimate because it is directly on the axis of sight between eye and subject; the view camera and waist-level camera tend to be more impersonal. The Seeing Phase is also affected by the concept of recognition. The

⁸¹Ibid.

discoveries of the camera, which the photographer perceives in the printing and display phases, are made to work for him when he is photographing.⁸²

A knowledge of both the Zone System and its short-cut methods is essential to the miniature cameraman:

. . . Where there is time for elaborate calculations the system lets the photographer plan special kinds of negatives for special interpretive problems. When speed is essential the short-cuts make eye and camera one instrument. The distinguishing concept of this phase is exposure by the roll as contrasted with carefully shooting one frame at a time. The concept is linked to the nature of the miniature camera to move rapidly all around its theme.⁸³

The miniature cameraman shoots as many rolls as is necessary to keep abreast of a situation. Machine gun tactics can be kept from deteriorating into sloppy seeing by disciplining every frame of a roll to be the best the eye can see. If a situation builds to a climax, the cameraman can stay right with it to the peak. If it collapses, the film can be discarded.⁸⁴

There are essentially four steps in the Printing Phase: (1) contact proofs, (2) enlarged proofs, (3) tonal scale proofs, and (4) final prints. Since selection goes on at each step, the final set of prints is not a collection of single prints

⁸²Ibid., p. 7.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

that somehow fit together, but a group of pictures that have belonged together, or have grown together, from the start. Exploration uncovers which photographs belong together.

Contact prints serve the photographer in two ways: They help the photographer make his selection of the negatives that he will print, and provide preliminary indications of cropping. Enlarged and cropped proofs enable the photographer to discover what the camera has discovered on its own. They are printed in the middle of the tonal scale in order to make visible every last iota of substance the negative contains on both ends of the scale.⁸⁵

The Printing Phase is often a time of discovery: There may be over or under exposure, unintentional solarization, camera or object movement, or faces and materials which are out of focus. The photographer may discover circumstances, situations, or space relationships that he did not see at the time of exposure. If the photographer is dishonest, he may claim them as his own; but they should be considered as "sketches" or hints of ideas that can be experimented with in other photographs. After the photographer experiments and digests these ideas, they will really become

⁸⁵White, "Exploratory Camera," I, 8.

his own. The lucky accident, through experimentation and digestion, can be brought under control and used to serve the aesthetic aims of the photographer.⁸⁶

Photographs clearly describe our inner selves, but because photography is deceptively impersonal, most people do not realize how much of themselves they (and others) can read in their prints. Since the camera stands between man and the world, it can reveal much about both. Shooting can be so rapid with the miniature camera that critical thinking at the time of exposure is suspended. Later, in the Printing Phase or Display Phase, the photograph may mirror the mental state or personality facet of the photographer which existed at the time the photograph was made. The photograph reveals a great deal about the inner workings of the photographer--to the psychologist, if not to the photographer himself.⁸⁷

Another important aspect of discovery takes place in the Enlarged Proof stage. Seeing and exposing can be so nearly simultaneous that the photographer will feel no more than a sense of importance at the time of exposure. The exposure may occur before the full significance of the event is grasped, and the event passes so rapidly that there is

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 9.

only time to half experience it. When this occurs, the photographer must wait until he sees the print to find what he had intuitively felt. The proof prints may become the first contact with the experience photographed! The experience is not at the time of exposure but at the Printing Phase. This lapse of time, between the moment of exposure and the moment of discovery, is significant:

. . . The concept of the print as the first original experience is almost the antithesis of view camera esthetic where the print is a record of something fully understood--even if not quite fully digested--before exposure. This is perhaps the most important concept in this rationale of exploration.⁸⁸

Tonal Scale Proofs are selections from the Enlarged Proofs which are printed for standard variations. The negative can be printed in several standard ways; such as high and low key, and short, full, and overscaled to uncover any other unsuspected statements. This should not be thought of as printing in slightly different ways to get the "best" print. The negative is treated to severe changes to find "what else" it says. The differences may be surprisingly great, and not just variations on a theme. White says:

. . . Some negatives can be printed in only one way; they seem to contain only one statement.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Apparently the contrast range and detail structure is not the only factor that makes exploratory printing possible. Actual tone distribution, chiaroscuro, and subject matter have much to do with it.⁸⁹

When the photographer has made a rigid analysis of the statements in each printing variation, he should know all that each negative contains. By this time, through the process of elimination, the negatives and prints from which to work up the final group will have been selected. The prints can be laid out, shuffled, assembled, grouped and sequenced, and reshuffled to discover which ones belong together and to encourage "free" growth to appear. Many different statements will be discovered that were never anticipated at the time of exposure. This opens up a whole new area of discovery and exploration.⁹⁰

The prints are like words in a vocabulary; the order of the prints affects the meanings of the statements--like word order in a poem. The order of "reading" is not only left to right but in all directions at once. Exploration takes the direction of finding the sentences that the prints will form. One sequence of prints may give a respectful twist to a situation, another may make it funny or tragic.⁹¹

⁸⁹White, "Exploratory Camera," I, 10.

⁹⁰Ibid. ⁹¹Ibid., p. 11.

The photographer, while he looks, shuffles, and tries to find the hidden statement in a large group of prints, experiences something beyond what he felt at the time of seeing. This grip or hold, that the photographs have upon him, will not be released until some statement out of the many possible ones "jells" for him:

. . . That which might have been half felt at exposure frequently grows during this period, comes to a climax in some form not previously known, and during this period the first great overwhelming experience of the prints as a whole comes to an end. If a statement jells of its own accord, or seems to, the photographer has an easy time. If not, he has to coerce it into shape.⁹²

Contrast and local tone control should balance in the entire set of final prints. When the final prints make up a sequence, it is better to print in sequence so the emotional line is followed. The set will be re-experienced as a sequence and the prints will acquire greater vitality. The Final Print Stage is not an exploratory period. It is a time for getting out of the negative what has been promised.⁹³

The photographer can control the Display Phase to the extent that he can control cropping, word copy, and whether

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 12; and Minor White, "How Concepts Differ for Two Cameras," American Photography, XLV, 9 (September, 1951), 551.

the print is displayed with or without borders. The view camera isolates experience to such an extent, that it requires borders on prints to isolate the print from its surroundings in a manner that matches the feeling of the subject. The miniature camera reverses isolation. Its prints feel better without borders because to be less isolated is nearer the feeling of the subject--such prints are like patches ripped out of the whole cloth or slices out of life. Instead of isolating experiences from reality, the miniature camera seems to embrace reality and participate in it. The action centered in the print is frequently linked visibly to action beyond the borders of the print. White says that perhaps it is because of this rich linkage to implied action outside of the print, that many miniature camera prints look misplaced or inadequate on bordered mounts.⁹⁴

Another reason why many miniature camera prints look misplaced when isolated, is because they simply are not complete enough to benefit by isolation. While the miniature camera can produce the single print, the single print is contrary to its rationale. It derives benefits from an abundance of images. This is contrary to view camera technique where

⁹⁴White, "Exploratory Camera," I, 12-13.

the single print is complete and self-sustaining within itself.⁹⁵

One of the benefits of the miniature is what can be called interdependence of prints. Instead of each print mutually excluding each other, they can mutually enhance one another. The flow of images depends on the organization of various intensities of individual pictures to reach a climax. This idea of interdependence in miniature camera prints is not a means to rescue slipshod seeing; but a means of turning into a whole statement, the most intense images time and the situation provides to the eye. Sometimes the entire meaning of a situation is two or more images, not one. The miniature camera can adequately handle either situation.⁹⁶

All of this analytical activity of darkroom, display wall and audience reading is carried over to field practice by a mechanism White calls "recognition." The mental-emotional integration of this mechanism is quite simple:

. . . First, there is a store of images, experience, ego problems, ideals, fears, which the man brings to his seeing at the start. Second, during the activity of seeing they are matched against the images in the visual world, like matching colors. This is done with some conscious effort and a great deal of unconscious participation. At the moment of matching or "recognition" there is a feeling of

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

importance at least, and sometimes a merciless impact. This in turn is secured by exposure. . . .⁹⁷

We can say that "recognition" is the trigger of exposure.

In view camera work, the lapse between recognition and exposure may be relatively long. There is time for analysis, and time to criticize the image and idea. Exposure sums up the entire experience. In miniature camera work, time is telescoped until recognition and exposure happen almost simultaneously. There is no time for criticism. Analysis, criticism, and the experience of the event are left to the printing phases. The print can reveal what was recognized, and so it can act as the original experience for the photographer.⁹⁸

The new images that the photographer discovers in his prints can be added to his visual storehouse. The whole exploratory role of the miniature camera is one of giving new images through the mechanism of recognition. Through this process the accidental is deliberately controlled; and through it also the blind spots of the individual can be uncovered and bypassed. Analysis helps to sink the images deeply into the photographer's mind, and to help him digest them. The digestion and experiencing of prints by analysis is a vital pre-requisite

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

for intuitive seeing.⁹⁹

The camera not only brings new images for the imagination to digest, but it can catch an unforeseen circumstance while the mind is still grasping for it. The process happens too quickly for even the mechanism of "recognition" to operate fully. It is difficult to say exactly what happens; but if the photographer's intuition is at work, the moment of significance can be sensed and the exposure can be made.

According to this rationale, the camera seems to be welded to the creative artist at three points: (1) when recognition without criticism or analysis triggers exposure, (2) when the print or group of prints is the photographer's experience, and (3) when the exploratory role of the camera slips a man by his own emotional blind spots.¹⁰⁰

WHITE ON CRAFTSMANSHIP

A photographer needs to know the feel of his medium, because it has a bearing on his emotional response and use of the medium. In photography, the feel of a medium includes all

⁹⁹White, "Exploratory Camera," I, 16.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

of the materials, theories, and practices. The photographer needs to have a feeling of what is going on in the emulsion. Somehow an intellectual comprehension has to be converted into an emotional, and kinesthetic or physical understanding of photography.¹⁰¹

White's Approach to Craftsmanship

White's approach to photography is based upon the philosophy that the photographer is both a craftsman and a creative artist. Creative vision determines what the photographer will photograph; craftsmanship provides him with the necessary technical control over his medium. White turned to the Ansel Adams Zone System because it provides a practical sensitometric control--one that allows the photographer to predict, and create, anything from the most literal rendition to the most non-literal deviation that he may desire. The Zone System brings the photographer to a new and deeper grasp of the materials and processes of photography and links them to a practical working philosophy.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 5, 1962.

¹⁰²Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), I, 6, 44-45; and Minor White, Zone System Manual (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1961), p. 13.

Inadequate Craftsmanship and Rationalization

If craftsmanship is inadequate to the visual situation, or if a mistake has been made and the print does not conform to the expectations of the photographer, the mind often begins to rationalize. "If the rationalizations are successful," says White, "one conditions oneself to accept the unfaithful print. In a very short time the original vision will fade and be replaced by the print."¹⁰³ Until the photographer becomes conscious of his inner rationalizations and has the strength to overcome them he will never know what is happening.

There are two ways to approach this problem of "rationalization." One solution is to treat the negative as a known step towards a print that manifests the original version, and to accept nothing less than that. Ansel Adams calls this "Planned Photography." The second approach to a conscious craftsmanship is through planned experimentation. In this case the negative is tested to see if it has a life of its own. If it does, it is printed in many ways to find the print that works in its own right. This approach requires a different form of discipline--the photographer must be receptive to the life of the negative and he must be able to select the

¹⁰³White, "Conscious Photography," II, 100.

print that for one reason or another communicates.¹⁰⁴

The Convincing Print

The convincing print looks the way it was meant to be. It is not a poor print that someone rationalized himself into accepting as "good enough." Whether or not a print appears "convincing," depends upon the audience. What a photographer will accept because of rationalization has little to do with how others will see the photograph. The members of the audience have to be convinced that the photograph is not a mistake.¹⁰⁵

The first way to attain a convincing photograph is through obvious faithfulness to the appearance of the original subject. If the spectator gets the feeling in looking at a photograph, that if he were beside the photographer at the time the exposure was made he would have seen exactly the same thing, he will get the feeling that the photograph is a faithful report of factual information.

The second way to attain a convincing print is aesthetic and graphic. A print that is an obvious distortion of the original subject will not register as a mistake if it satisfies some familiar aesthetic and compositional standards

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

of painting or the graphic arts. Such a photographic print does not necessarily resemble a drawing, but it does conform to the painters' standards of compositional dynamics. The "convincing" print must always bear telltale signs of its camera origin, because persons with a deep understanding of photographic images possess a set of standards based on a "rendering of reality."¹⁰⁶

The Replica Print

The photographer, who works in a highly conscious state of critical craftsmanship, should have little trouble making identical prints. The secret is discipline. The secret of replica prints is to standardize a procedure and stick to it.

The photographer must recall exactly how the final print was made. If a small quantity of fresh developer is used for each print, and if development is by time and temperature, it is only necessary to recall the pattern of local exposure control (burning-in and dodging) to produce the replica print. White says exactly what procedure the photographer must follow:

. . . He has to learn rhythmic burning and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

dodging, to put a voltage regulator in the line to the enlarger, and to be consciously aware of what he is doing. Developer should be used in fresh amounts (approx. 300 c.c. per one 8x10 print or equivalent) or in enormous amounts for only a few prints. The solution should be kept moving all the time. The first print developed always has more contrast and richness than the succeeding ones. So when using a gallon or more to process up to 6 prints, the "edge" of the developer should be removed with a test print, to be discarded immediately. Thereafter the contrast in the succeeding prints will remain nearly identical for a half dozen or so.¹⁰⁷

STRAIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

It is difficult to say what the correct definition of pure photography is. What Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and others defined as pure photography may be correct, or it may just be the way their needs at that time dictated. Some photographers have always kept within the characteristics that are peculiar to photography, but most of the photographers who practiced some form of pure photography before Peter Henry Emerson's book Naturalistic Photography was published, did so unconsciously.¹⁰⁸

Since Emerson's time, photographers have been more

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 48; and White, "Conscious Photography," II, 101-02.

¹⁰⁸ White, "Conscious Photography," I, 67; and Minor White, "Lyrical and Accurate," Image, V, 8 (October, 1956), 173.

conscious about what constitutes pure photography. Emerson battled against the accepted art photographers of the time who tried to imitate what painting was doing. He believed that photography has a unique way of looking at the world and an esthetic that is worth exploring in its own right. However, the esthetics of naturalistic photography that Emerson propounded is no longer sufficient. The photography, that we know today, has added characteristics of lenses, shutters, and films that were unknown in the 1880's.¹⁰⁹

The Characteristics of Pure Photography

Continuous tone is basic to "straight" or "pure" photography; it was known in Emerson's day, and it is still an important characteristic of photography. Differential focus (meaning pictures that are only critically sharp at the point of focus), and over-all sharpness, which is obtainable by the stopped-down diaphragm, are also still in effect. In the 1930's, this point of over-all sharpness was made a main issue by a group of West Coast photographers who called themselves F 64. This F 64 group included, among others, Edward Weston and Ansel Adams.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹White, "Lyrical and Accurate," V, 173.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

These five characteristics: precise image, continuous tone, over-all sharpness, differential focus, and limitless replicas lie at the heart of any definition of straight photography. Straight photography also implies: wide angle to telephoto perspective, and blurred or stopped motion.

In modern times, the development of high speed films has brought the degree of movement blur under the photographer's control. Likewise, the Bauhaus group in the 1920's experimented with the multiple exposure technique and learned to use it purposefully rather than as a mistake. Frozen motion, blur, and multiple exposure are now a matter of the photographer's choice and have thus become tangible characteristics of photography.¹¹¹

Fast lenses and films have made the transitory gesture or glance a characteristic of pure photography. Gesture or glance, however, are not tangible characteristics and so White fills out the definition of pure photography with a listing of intangible characteristics.

The first pair of intangible characteristics is the sense of presence and its close associate, the sense of

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 174; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

authenticity. Both of these depend upon an image of great clarity that renders visible everything that is in sight.

. . . The sense of presence can be recognized when the illusion of reality is so strong that it seems to be your eyes gazing at the subject unhindered by the glass eye of the camera and unmindful of the eye of the photographer. You are there. This is the way that the viewer is transported by the photograph to a different place and a different time.¹¹²

It is impossible to say where presence merges into the sense of authenticity. We accept the photograph as a document, because we feel that we are there and what we see must be true.¹¹³

The most intangible of all the characteristics of unique photography is Innocence of Eye. It is difficult to identify in a photograph. It is most effective when it is the most unobtrusive. Nevertheless, Innocence of Eye has a quality of its own. It means to see as a child sees--with freshness and a deep sense of wonder.¹¹⁴

Photography Compared to Painting

The act of selection may be considered as the photographer's equivalent of the painter's act of composition. Photographers select their subject matter, and if they are

¹¹² White, "Lyrical and Accurate," V, 174.

¹¹³ Ibid. ¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 175.

artists, they invariably recognize the significant form in the subject matter they select. Therefore "selection" is characteristic of photography when it is used as an art medium.

The photographer, using a kind of instantaneous analysis, selects the significant from a stream of random events. The painter composes by synthesizing significance out of pigments. Selecting is an act of choice. To some degree, it reveals the personality traits of the photographer. It may be long and deliberate, during which all of the photographer's background is drawn into the experience and summed up at the instant of exposure; or it may happen so quickly that everything that the photographer is becomes caught up in a moment of recognized significance. The painter alters reality; the photographer alters nothing. Selection is confined to the world as the photographer finds it. He waits and recognizes significance.¹¹⁵

The creative photographer must have a comprehension of the medium as a whole, to match his "feeling" for the world. "Camera vision," or the ability to look at a scene and see a photograph in the mind's eye, is rare among

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 176.

photographers. Some photographers--particularly those with training in painting--try to imitate the painter; others only catch something interesting with the camera occasionally.¹¹⁶

Photography must be distinguished from other art forms if we would be faithful to the identity of the medium. It differs from other mediums visually--in the subtle gradation of tonal separation; intellectually--in its high concentration of commonly accepted symbols; and emotionally--because it makes us feel the strong presence of reality. If art is considered to be a medium which is capable of communicating feelings or experiences, there is no creative difference between photography and art.¹¹⁷

There are two types of individuals in the creative arts--the "finders" and the "alterers." White describes them in this manner:

... . The "finders" are delighted with the world as it is. The finders search until the world opens up for them. "Alterers" have the urge to alter rather than to find; so they accelerate all the accidents the medium is heir to until they get so far from the camera that

¹¹⁶ Minor White, "Call for Critics," Infinity, IX, 9 (November, 1960), 5.

¹¹⁷ Minor White, "What Is Photography?," Photo Notes (Spring, 1950), p. 19.

it would have been easier to have painted.¹¹⁸

In photography, alteration abuses the medium. A medium should not be forced to do something it cannot do. The camera is capable of producing the most convincing illusion of reality; the painter turns the visible world into one of his own. Photography can capture and hold the significance of reality; the painter shapes it. Both directions are vital. If photography is used to imitate painting, we overlook its own uniqueness.¹¹⁹

PREVISUALIZATION

The term "previsualization" stands for a developed ability to look at a scene and at the same time hold in the mind's eye the image of the print which is still to be made. It is a discipline by which all the tangible characteristics built into the medium of photography are brought into the circle of unique photography. Developed to the point of a discipline, previsualization takes the accidental out of the seeing and pictures of an individual.

If a person can imagine or predict what a multiple

¹¹⁸Minor White, "Towards Camera," Photography, X, 10 (October, 1955), 30.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

exposure can do on a single sheet of film, he has every right to call the photograph his own. If he uses multiple exposures as another way of putting the accidental on film, without previsualization, he is merely postponing the moment of selection until he can look over the prints.¹²⁰

Seeing and Previsualization

The ability to previsualize comes from practice, and it can only be learned by direct experience with the medium. It is a wedding of technique to purpose. It involves "seeing" as compared to "not seeing" but it also involves "seeing" as a camera.

"Seeing" stands for a heightened awareness of things. While in the act of "seeing," we do not impose our thoughts on the subject. It is a state of rapport with the object, or a kind of two way interchange of some degree.

. . . Seeing as a camera refers to full knowledge of the medium. Each act of previsualization begins with "seeing" the subject, and is followed by a grasp of the subject as if "seen by the camera." . . .¹²¹

¹²⁰White, "Lyrical and Accurate," V, 176; and Minor White, Zone System Manual (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1961), p. 9.

¹²¹White, Zone System Manual, p. 10.

The Creative Application of Previsualization

It is possible to look at a scene and imagine all the possible renderings that are possible with that specific subject. This is ordinarily done after meter readings have been made and all the potential combinations of exposure and development have been studied. White says: "With all the data at hand one may previsualize in the direction of realism or towards stylization or into 'abstraction' according to one's creative purposes."¹²² The photographer can previsualize, in succession, all the potential renderings of the subject and select the one rendering that will best fulfill his own purposes with the subject at hand.¹²³

From many subjects, more than one convincing rendering will be possible. Sometimes, one of the hidden renderings will fit the photographer's purpose better than all the rest. After the photographer has gone through the mechanics of imagining a normal print, he should previsualize, in succession, all the potential renderings that a scene may be hiding within itself.

Regardless of whether the photographer's purpose is to capture reality or record some inner state,

¹²²Ibid., p. 47.

¹²³Ibid.

previsualization leads to finding which one rendering will materialize his intentions. By previsualizing every potential in the scene, the photographer can choose the one which clearly states his interpretative purpose. With practice, previsualization of this precise rendering will become intuitive.¹²⁴

The Zone System and Previsualization

No matter how brilliant a photographer's picture sense may be, it is not possible to make good photographs unless he knows the properties of the materials he uses. The Zone System, devised by Ansel Adams in 1940, allows the photographer to predict the final result exactly. The System adds the factor of previsualization to sensitometry. Previsualization has a special meaning in the craftsmanship of the Zone System. In the moment of previsualization, craftsmanship is completely at the service of the expressive-interpretive purpose of the photographer. The System puts the photographer in full command of his medium.¹²⁵

The Zone System, while it takes into consideration

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

¹²⁵ Minor White, Exposure with the Zone System (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1956), no page number; and Minor White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling," Infinity, IX, 2 (February, 1960), 8.

all features of the medium, is mainly concerned with the tonal values and their control. The system enables the photographer to exercise control over the exposure and development of both negative and print, in order to produce a print whose values help to make the intended statement. The Zone System, however, offers far more than contrast control of any given negative. It develops the photographer's ability to determine and produce the rendering that he prefers for any subject. For example, he may decide on a vigorous print because the subject has strength; or a soft, quiet print because a quality of serenity seems more important. Most important, the Zone System allows the choice to be made on location, before the exposure is made.¹²⁶

The Zone System can help the photographer correlate six factors that are present every time an exposure is made: subject, light, camera, light-sensitive materials, the purposes of the photographer, and his psycho-physiological responses to the subject. The System fits in well with the creative application of previsualization because it develops one's ability to know what the medium can do in every circumstance, and then to decide on the kind of print that

¹²⁶White, Zone System Manual, pp. 8-9.

will serve one's purpose.¹²⁷

Tonality Identification and Zone Assignment

The identification of tonalities and their assignment to zones are affected by physiological and psychological factors. If we recognize some dark value as coal, then we will treat these values as "black" even though they are dark grays. Likewise, we associate the tonal values of snow as "white" even though they are light grays. Middle gray surrounded by black appears lighter than middle gray surrounded by white.

Tonal identification is also affected by the psychological connotation of the subject. Coal, hearses, and thousands of other associations, all help us form our idea of what black is. Despite the fact that our mental gray scale fluctuates unpredictably, it is possible to look at a subject and consciously identify the tones according to memorized shades of gray. We can literally see Caucasian skin in sunlight as Zone VI and Zone III shadows. One automatically starts to imagine a photograph while looking at the scene.¹²⁸

Previsualization and Film Development

The photographer can look at his exposure meter and

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 9, 17.

¹²⁸ Ibid., pp. 18, 35-36.

predict the tonal effect of changing development time from a standard. The effects of exposure on density, and the effect of variable film development time on contrast, can be previsualized and controlled with the Zone System.

In the Zone System, the negative is developed in accordance with the brightness range of each scene. Each scene and each negative is considered to be a separate problem. This is in contrast to general photographic practice where the variety of brightness ranges are controlled by the use of contrast grades in printing paper, special paper developers, and the use of several kinds of film. The Zone System controls brightness ranges by a pre-planned series of negative developing times.¹²⁹

Previsualization and the Print

The photographer who knows the Zone System can previsualize and plan the print that he wants before the exposure is made:

. . . The previsualized image, imagined in zones, is "stored" in the negative. Exposure of the print is adjusted, more or less within the segment of a print zone, to the precise value needed to fulfill the remembered

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 45; and White, Exposure with the Zone System, p. 6.

previsualization of the image.¹³⁰

Printing is distinctly treated as an interpretive act or process. It involves a return to the heightened awareness that characterizes an individual in the state of previsualization. If printing is to be a way of recalling the mental image of the subject and its photograph, a state of "seeing" must be created within the photographer at this time.

After considering the similarity between the two conditions, White applied the term "postvisualization" to the printing stage. Postvisualization may be thought of as a necessary condition, in which the events "deepfrozen" in the negative, are interpreted and materialized. Unfortunately, the time lapse between the time of "seeing" and the printing period can be destructive. The photographer may have to use some device, such as the original negative, as a trigger to bring back the associations and taste of the original scene.¹³¹

The Zone System as a Discipline

White defines the ideal negative as one that can be printed without dodging, burning-in, tonal alterations, or

¹³⁰White, Zone System Manual, p. 30.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 31; and Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), II, 90.

cropping that were not foreseen at the time of exposure.

The moment of exposure sums up everything that we hope to make visible in the print. To hold to such thinking amounts to a strict and severe discipline, but this discipline is the ultimate value of the Zone System. We are forced to be honest with ourselves. We can no longer accept the short-scale print made on a #1 contrast grade paper or an over-scaled print made on a #3 paper, as a deliberate creative product, simply because they are handsome or emotionally satisfying. However, the logical procedures and discipline of the System provide technical control when the photographer works intuitively and directly out of a feeling state.¹³²

The Zone System and Creative Intent

The ultimate achievement of Zone System practice is to enable the photographer to fulfill his creative intentions. Consequently, the print must do more than provide an accurate tonal rendering of the subject. The "full-scale print" or "normal print," where all 10 print values from Zone 0 to Zone IX (textureless black to textureless white) are visible, should only be thought of as a point of departure. If the

¹³²White, Zone System Manual, p. 10; and White, Exposure with the Zone System, p. 37.

"normal" print is thought of as the ultimate in print quality, technique becomes a way of closing the doors to creativity.

A print should be studied as if it were a new visual fact, totally independent of the photographer. The photographer should learn to disassociate himself from his own photographs, and to look at them as though they were made by someone else. A photograph should be faithful to the intentions and purposes of the photographer. If not, how can the photographer honestly say that this accidental interpretation is a part of himself? If we are going to be honest about it, the photograph that fails to carry out the previsualized conception should be discarded as a failure; unless the photographer wishes to make over his inner-self to correspond with the statement of the photograph.¹³³

THE SUBCONSCIOUS MIND IN PHOTOGRAPHY

The photographic image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. The photographer can put things into the subconscious and get a visual answer in due time--if he works in a seeing state with a blank and responsive mind, and if something is fed into the subconscious mind through

¹³³ White, Zone System Manual, pp. 21, 28, 62.

meditation. Sometimes the relationship between what has been fed into the subconscious can be seen instantly, sometimes only after the print is seen in meditation.¹³⁴

The Unconscious Creative Cycle

The photographer's task is to make emotional feelings come out visually. The process by which this occurs can be called: The Unconscious Creative Cycle. First, an Idea Feeling becomes isolated and drops into the subconscious from the surface mind. The photographer's mind is thus sensitized, and found objects or objects in the studio develop into an idea when put together. Next, there is a visual echo of the Idea Feeling. The photographer recognizes that something exciting has happened, but he may or may not know the cause. The photograph may be the result of contemplation and pre-visualization; or it can be created very quickly, as a result of the photographer's recognition that something of importance has taken place. Finally, the new photograph is contemplated and the Idea Feeling is identified. The Conscious and Unconscious are united by Feeling, which leads to their fusion in

¹³⁴Statement by Minor White during a tape recorded lecture, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 18, 1965; and Minor White, "Messages, Mirror, Manifestations" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October 18, 1968), pp. 160, 168.

a spontaneous public image or photograph. 135

To understand how the unconscious creative cycle works, we must understand what the "blank mind" is and how contemplation is used to limber up the unconscious mind. Contemplation can be directed inward or outward as the individual wishes, and so there are two distinct types of contemplation--the subjective and the objective.

The Subjective Contemplation of an object or photograph is undertaken for the express purpose of exposing some aspect of the self of the viewer. The direction of Subjective Contemplation is inward, because of the viewer's association with the contemplative act.

The aim of Objective Contemplation is the opposite of self-discovery. It is undertaken when the purposes of Subjective Contemplation have run their course, and its purpose is to establish rapport with the physical world. Objective Contemplation seeks to discover the meanings of things in the outside world. It reports facts, it allows us to look at the photograph as a unique object in the world, and it ultimately allows the spectator to establish contact with

¹³⁵ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958; and Minor White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling," Infinity, IX, 2 (February, 1960), 7.

the photographer.¹³⁶

The dominant feature of the "blank" mind is the absence of preconceived ideas. Preconceived ideas serve to obscure the receptivity of the conscious mind. When the state of mind is "blank," intuition and perception function at their best because the subconscious will overcome the surface mind when the moment of recognition strikes. In this state, one can turn the seeing inward or outward at will.¹³⁷

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S RESPONSE TO THE SUBJECT

The creative photographer should not impose himself on the subject, he should submit himself to objects. The camera should be thought of as a means to experience the world directly rather than as a tool to impose the photographer's preconceptions upon it.¹³⁸

The photographer must not attempt to project himself into what he sees, because it requires a receptive state of mind to catch a manifestation of the subject idea. The photographer's state of mind should be similar, if not identical,

¹³⁶White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling," IX, 8.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Minor White, "Towards Camera," Photography, X, 10 (October, 1955), 31.

to the state achieved during the serious contemplation of a photograph. This approach to the medium requires faith that objects may be fascinating in themselves or have a magic all their own. If the photographer works with a receptive state of mind, the photograph may reveal the essence of the object and disclose something about its inner truth.¹³⁹

White has described how the subject idea is given form:

. . . With great luck the first echo caught is a brilliant manifestation of the Idea. Usually there is a gradual emergence, the Idea is slowly sketched out, one photograph at a time, each of which fills a part of the rhythm or distorts the whole. As the photographer contemplates these "sketches" he begins to see the shape of the Idea. Then, one photograph somehow, is understood to fit, if not exactly, then sufficiently to release the man from his minor obsession. Once a "good gestalt" is achieved he is free to go on to other Ideas.¹⁴⁰

Ideas come from outside of us as well as inside; and impressions, events and circumstances reach the subconscious from the surface mind at all times. In addition, however, there seems to be an independent source of ideas originating within

¹³⁹Minor White, "Articulation," Aperture, VII, 2 (1959), 68; and Minor White, "Are Your Prints Transparent?," American Photography, XLV, 11 (November, 1951), 675-76.

¹⁴⁰White, "Articulation," VII, 68.

the depth mind.¹⁴¹

Literal and Non-Literal Interpretation

There are basically two kinds of photographs--the literal and the non-literal. In a literal photograph, there is significance within the picture. The subject is important in its own right. In a non-literal photograph, significance is invented. Emotional overtones are important, not the object in itself.¹⁴²

About 98 percent of photography today, is literal documentary photography. It is aimed at realism and at making the viewer see what the photographer saw. In the non-literal photograph, the original subject is unidentifiable, and what you understand from it depends on what you draw out of yourself. The "realistically" oriented will see only the subject; the imaginative or intellectual person will see the implications of the photograph's design, signs, symbols, and associations, etc.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

¹⁴³Minor White, "Call for Critics," Infinity, IX, 9 (November, 1960), 5.

Literal Interpretation

Literal interpretation is the attempt to make a print where the substance and detail of the subject matter are faithful to the feeling of the original. The most difficult problem of literal interpretation is to reproduce the facts yet make the spectator realize that there is feeling and meaning beneath them. Since a tone for tone reproduction of the original scene often affects the spectator as false, some tonal alterations normally have to be made to produce a convincing photograph.

Tonal alterations must be made because of the translation from a three dimensional world to the illusion of three dimensions on a two dimensional surface. The photographer is forced to make some kind of a choice as to how he will alter reality, and consequently he must make some kind of an interpretation.¹⁴⁴

Non-Literal Interpretation

The non-literal interpretation deviates from what the spectator would consider a faithful rendering of a given subject. If the subject is unfamiliar to the spectator, considerable alteration can occur before he notices it. Alteration is only one way that the non-literal photograph can

¹⁴⁴White, Exposure with the Zone System, pp. 37-38.

be created. In some cases a mild degree of non-literality happens when a normal contrast negative is printed on a high or low contrast grade of paper. In other cases, non-literality happens through the derivations possible in experimental photography.¹⁴⁵

Non-literal interpretation is a legitimate process, although the non-literal interpretation of a particular negative may be open to question. The Zone System and previsualization offer a solution to the problem because they allow the photographer to plan the non-literal interpretation at the time of exposure. The photographer can investigate all the kinds of photographs a given scene might yield while looking at it.¹⁴⁶

If the photographer plans, visualizes, and previsualizes the non-literal interpretation, the element of the accidental is removed and the photograph will tend to be more convincing. If the spectator gets the notion that the photograph is the result of an accident, which the photographer claims as his own, he may well accuse the photographer of phoniness. The idea behind the non-literal photograph is not to convince the spectator of the photograph's faithfulness to the original scene, but to convince him of the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 11, 38.

presence and sincerity of the photographer. No matter how spontaneous or accidental the subject of the picture may be, the photographer must convince the spectator that it was no accident.¹⁴⁷

Negatives can have a life of their own. Many photographers discover non-literal interpretations "in" the negative, which were not previsualized, and rationalize until the non-literal interpretation is justified. A photographer can become so intrigued with a negative that his original intentions are lost. Previsualization lies at the heart of convincing photography; because it permits the photographer to look at a scene, transpose it with the imaginary eye into all the various kinds of literal and non-literal pictures that the medium will allow, and to select the one that best suits his purpose. The previsualized photograph tends to convince the spectator that it was no accident the photographer was there and no accident that he saw what he did.¹⁴⁸

Chance or "Happenstance"

If a photographer takes what chance and accident give him, he has a right to claim it as his. Chance put the subject there to be photographed, but the photographer must be

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

present to see it. He must be present at the precise moment when the meaning of some form, pattern, sign, or symbol takes on significance. Because he alone saw the ulterior meaning of some chance occurrence, the photographer has a right to claim his found photograph.¹⁴⁹

Chance continually carves new forms, drops an object into the right place, and reveals new forms. Some photographers use the accidental with purpose. They know what the chance symbol means and use it. Others garble a message, that has already been stated clearly by chance, by attempting to alter or clarify it. The photographer can use chance or "happenstance" to his advantage if he understands something about it. He must have enough intuition and imagination to recognize those forms, patterns, signs, symbols, and subject relationships which will have meaning for his fellow man.

If the photographer finds that a picture is suddenly visible in an area where he was previously unable to find it, nothing has changed except perhaps the perception of the photographer or the lighting. However, in the process of discovering the significant in chance forms, the photographer will see many subjects that have no possible significance to

¹⁴⁹Minor White, "Happenstance and How It Involves the Photographer," Photography, XI, 10 (October, 1956), 73.

human beings. Other subjects will take on significance as age creeps on and chance takes over, because the farther an object gets from the hand of the creator, the more the imprint of their personality fades. When this happens, the photographer will be able to find things that were never intended by the originator.¹⁵⁰

Expressive and Creative Photography

The term "creative" stands for that kind of photograph which communicates what one has to say to another person. The term "expressive" stands for the use of the camera to discover one's inner self.

Since the "creative" photograph is expected to evoke a predetermined mood in the spectator, the photographer should know what he wishes to communicate so well that he can find the right means and the proper photograph to make another person understand what he is trying to say. The "creative" photographer looks at everything to see if it might possibly be the photograph that he is searching for. The whole

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 44-45, 73; Minor White, "The Light Sensitive Mirage," Aperture, VI, 2 (1958), 82; and Minor White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 166.

creative process of understanding a subject is colored by also trying to see if its essence is similar enough to some abstract idea to be a possible subject for that idea. This kind of creative photography requires a sensitivity to the unique implications of every subject, then selecting the one which is photogenic at the moment.¹⁵¹

There is a second approach to creative photography in which the photographer attempts to understand all the possible implications of a subject, and then sees if one implication might be similar enough to the idea in his mind to illustrate it and make it visible.

The first is accomplished by photographing the subject itself in such a way that its character is revealed; the second, by choosing a subject to photograph which will illustrate an idea existing only in the mind of the photographer. The first method requires an understanding of the subject; the second, recognition of what will convey a meaning.¹⁵²

Both of these approaches to creative photography

¹⁵¹Minor White, "A Unique Experience in Teaching Photography," Aperture, IV, 4 (1956), 153; and Minor White, "When Is Photography Creative?," American Photography, XLIII (January, 1943), 16.

¹⁵²White, "When Is Photography Creative?,"

rely upon the capacity of the medium to convey feelings about one subject through another subject. When photography is used in this manner, the physical nature of the subject is immaterial. The photographer must be open-minded to all subjects, and look for a subject capable of communicating his concept to an audience.¹⁵³

People can be photographed in a similar manner, by creating emotions in the subject which will bring out what you wish to convey. A mood must be created in the subject within which facial expressions can be brought into a series of changes for the purpose of selection. If the creative effort is mutual, a creative state will exist during which new things will arise spontaneously and selection becomes a matter of photographing fast enough.¹⁵⁴

Creativeness in photography is found exclusively in the perceptive-phase, or the period prior to exposure, rather than the execution-phase of photography. Fortunately, the photographer is conditioned by his medium to automatically recognize the moment when a subject is fully revealed.

In the perceptive-phase there are three ways of practicing creativeness: The first way is to understand the

American Photography, XLIII (January, 1943), 17.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 17.

meaning of the subject--although we should understand that what we know about the subject colors our understanding of it; the second way is to understand all the implications of the subject and use one to illustrate an abstract idea; and the third way is to establish a mutual understanding between the photographer and the sitter, which can develop into a state of mutual creativeness.¹⁵⁵

The expressive photograph has significance for the photographer, but it may be meaningless or mean something entirely different to others. The photographer may see something and record it without once considering the feelings of those who may see it. It is the kind of photograph that allows the photographer to explore his own personality, and it is made when you want to photograph in order to contemplate and analyze what a photograph really means to you.¹⁵⁶

Expressive photography allows the photographer to learn what he has to say. In creative photography, the problem is to make photographs which will have significance and evoke a predetermined emotion in the spectator. Expressive

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 16; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

photography shows you what you have to say and there is a constant alternation between this and creative photography. It is a dual process--studying one's own inner growth, and then creating.¹⁵⁷

Things for What They Are-Things for What Else
They Are

White began his photographic career in 1937 at Point Lobos, California. He tried to reach the essence of shell and peppers--to record reality--but he found that each photograph was a mirror of himself. In 1950, he started to photograph things for what else they are. He learned that while the camera records reality, it transforms it better.¹⁵⁸

At first, White photographed chance moments as they were given to him. Later, he learned to make chance moments occur by looking at the subject until he saw what else it was. White believed that photographed surfaces must reveal the essences of objects, places, persons, and situations; but his photographs mirrored his own inner-self. He discovered that in photographing things for what else they are,

¹⁵⁷Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

¹⁵⁸Minor White, "Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), p. 106.

the photographer can go either towards himself or away from himself.¹⁵⁹

When you try to photograph something for what it is, you have to go out of yourself, out of your way, to understand the essence of the object. The subject concept goes beyond that which can be seen; it includes factual information about the object, the essence of the object, and the inner facts as well. If an object is 3-dimensional but it is photographed as a flat object, you are making it do something, and you are photographing things as they become.¹⁶⁰

In photographing things for what else they are, transpositions may be made in form, time, texture, density, meaning, resemblance, suggestion, etc. A rock may become a landscape and frost on the window pane may become a sea wave. This kind of photography requires observation on the part of the photographer. He must observe the changes made by lighting, shadows, objects in space, and the changes in perspective that occur when the focal length of the lens is altered. The concept is a subjective one. The photographer

¹⁵⁹ Minor White, "Minor White," Camera, XXXVIII, 8 (August, 1959), 5-6.

¹⁶⁰ White, "Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations," p. 111; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

must ask himself: What does the subject remind me of? How do I feel about it? What is it equivalent to?¹⁶¹

Through the juxtaposition of one object with another, the connotations of each can be made to change. The objects are not visually changed by photographing them together but their implications are, and the conflict of connotations becomes the impact of the photograph. The relationship of objects creates a kind of "third effect," and the concept of Things For What Else They Are is extended to still another dimension.¹⁶²

PHOTOGRAPHY OF AN INNER STATE OF MIND

To understand this intangible concept, it is helpful to think of photography as a mirage, the camera as if it were a metamorphosizing machine, and the photograph as if it were a metaphor. As the degree of metamorphosis increases, the original subject has less and less bearing on the ultimate meaning of the photograph, and the mental image within

¹⁶¹Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

¹⁶²Minor White, "How To Find Your Own Approach to Photography," American Photography, XLV, 7 (July, 1951), 407-08; and Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964), p. 199.

the spectator becomes increasingly the only possible source of his experience. When the link to the original subject is broken or stretched thin, the spectator is left to his own associations. White believes that this intangible realm of controlling the spectator's mental image will be the artist photographer's future field of communication.¹⁶³

We make mental adjustments and permit shades of gray to stand for color, two dimensions to stand for three, and picture size to stand for life size; but in spite of our acceptance of photographic authenticity, a photograph of a tree is not the tree itself. The photograph is not reality. When the photographer is freed from thinking only in terms of surfaces, texture, form, and substance, he can use these elements to pursue images of poetic beauty and truth. Symbolism, metaphors, and Equivalents are the pictorial elements which the photographer can use to depict the inner world--to render the invisible visible.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Minor White, "The Light Sensitive Mirage," Aperture, 2 (1958), 79-81.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 78; Minor White, "Anonymity," Aperture, VII, 2 (1959), 73; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, 1963.

Channeling the Spectator's Associations

The photographer loses control of communication when the spectator is left to his own associations. The only dependable way of working in the private world of other people's associations and mental images is to channel the spectator's association with a title. A photograph may need a title because it does not function as a source of information. It may be meaningful only if the subject is treated as a kind of peg to hang symbols upon. At the opposite extreme, the identification of subject matter can be so obvious that a title is necessary to suggest how the picture might be experienced more fully.¹⁶⁵

The Record of an Inner State

The objectivity of the camera enables the photographer to turn it inward and use it as a means of self-discovery. However, an image can be a record of an inner state that the photographer neither remembers seeing nor experiencing at the moment of exposure. A meaning or event, occurring in a photograph, may be entirely independent of the photographer. When an "urgency" is present it seems to find many mirrors of itself in the visible world. The photograph which is a record

¹⁶⁵White, "The Light Sensitive Mirage," VI, 81.

of some inner state can function as a means of self-discovery because it can help the photographer to understand what his inner state was at the time the photograph was made. If this kind of photograph is exhibited, the camera can hold up a piece of the photographer's psyche for public display.¹⁶⁶

Mirror Images

The "mirror image" is in the realm of Things For What Else They Are or what things are in the process of becoming. Mirroring starts with the self-portrait. If the photographer changes expression, he brings some inner change to the surface of his face for the camera to see. In effect, his facial expression acts as a mirror of some aspect of his inner-self. Mirroring, however, goes much farther than that. The similarities of any kind that one feels to be parallel to one's self may act as a mirror, at least to the photographer.¹⁶⁷

Probe Images

The Probe Image is one that causes a spectator to look into himself. Unfortunately, because audiences find it

¹⁶⁶White, "Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations," pp. 160, 178-81; Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), II, 109-11; and Minor White and others, "The Workshop Idea in Photography," Aperture, IX, 4 (1961), 154.

¹⁶⁷White, "Conscious Photography," I, 194-96.

discomforting to take a searching look at themselves, there is a tendency to dismiss these penetrating photographs as psychologically distressing. The Probe Image seems to have an unpredictable life of its own--some find it discomforting, some find it to be therapy, and others find it exciting. There is no sure way to plan a photograph so that it will act as a probe.¹⁶⁸

Dream Images

The Dream Image appears to be a visual message from the psyche to the photographer. The image should be read by the photographer, but it is a personal message and not really meant for public viewing. One can learn to interpret Dream Images just about as easily as one learns to read a new language, however not all photographs should be read.¹⁶⁹

Message Images

The Message Image is similar to the Dream Image in appearance, in the necessity to know enough to recognize when a message is present, and in the knowledge that is required to read it.

Both Dream and Message Images appear as hard reality.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 197-200.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 200-204.

The difference between them is quite simple. The Message Image comes from a source independent of the photographer's psyche. "The content," says White, "is new material that the person could never have thought of. The content is objective not imagined. This is the remarkable part of the Message Image."¹⁷⁰

The Mirror Images of "things for what else they are" and all the variations extend beyond sight and insight. Content and transcendence are important, not the manner nor the means which the photographer chooses to employ. Realism may be stretched to the point of abstraction; but some tie with the world of appearances must be maintained, or else the camera's strongest point--its authenticity--will be irretrievably lost.¹⁷¹

THE EQUIVALENT

The Equivalent established the core of the kind of art photography will be. In this approach, the subject is treated without regard for either its individuality or its essence, or the reaction it causes in the photographer; but

¹⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 205-06.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 209; and White, "Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations," p. 65.

it is treated as the medium of expression. The photograph functions as a metaphor, and the camera sees through the world of surfaces to the implications of the subject.¹⁷²

Stieglitz used clouds and people for Equivalents, but it makes no difference what subject matter is used. Equivalence is not a style. It is a function between the spectator, the photograph, and extending in time perhaps to the person who made it. It can be a mirror of one's inner-self. If a feeling of loneliness is uppermost in the consciousness of the photographer, an old building, a park, a pond of lilies, or even a lamp post will provide the subject matter for the camera. The same subject matter can communicate other feelings as well.¹⁷³

The Process of Equivalence

It was Stieglitz' response to his subject matter which made the equivalence. This special response may be described as an image taken into a person and retained

¹⁷²White, "The Light Sensitive Mirage," VI, 78; statement by Minor White during a tape recorded lecture, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 18, 1965; and Minor White, "Photography Is an Art," Design, XLIX, 4 (December, 1947), 8.

¹⁷³White, "Photography Is an Art," XLIX, 8; and statement by Minor White during a tape recorded lecture, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 18, 1965.

because it is wanted. Once this image is within a person, it is turned into his own private image. This private image will cross a person's mind from time to time, even though it may not be understood. Because of some human emotion arising out of fear, love, annoyance, anger, joy, or human trust, etc., there is a desire or a compulsion to remember the image. It is held close within the person, and it therefore changes him in some way.¹⁷⁴

An Equivalent evokes a feeling similar to one which already exists in some other event or photograph. It works by the power of suggestion; and the mind of the spectator must get past the intellectual symbolism of the photograph, because the photograph should evoke a feeling, not an intellectual idea.

A photograph may act as an Equivalent to another photograph in this manner: Photograph A is expressive. It has meaning only for the photographer in that it is a stage of growth. Photograph A¹ gives feeling to you but also to someone else, and is derived from self-exploration. If Photograph B has the feeling of A¹, it is said to be equivalent

¹⁷⁴Minor White, "Pictorial Photography," The Encyclopedia of Photography (1964), XV, 2875.

to A¹.¹⁷⁵

When a photograph functions for a given person as an Equivalent, it is acting as a symbol or plays the role of a metaphor for something that is beyond the subject photographed. It is both a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously a spontaneous symbol. (A spontaneous symbol is one which develops automatically to fill the need of the moment.) Equivalence is a two-way reaction between the photograph + the person looking at the photograph and the person's mental image. It is only in the mental image held that there is any possibility of a metaphorical function occurring.¹⁷⁶

A photograph functions as an Equivalent in the viewer's psyche by the mechanisms of "projection" and "empathy." If the viewer is not subject-identification bound, he will respond to the expressive qualities of shapes and forms on a subconscious level. The effect that seems to be associated with Equivalence may be described in this manner:

¹⁷⁵Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

¹⁷⁶Minor White, "Equivalence the Perennial Trend," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 169, 171.

When both the subject matter and manner of rendering are transcended, that which seems to be matter becomes what seems to be spirit.¹⁷⁷

Equivalence revolves around the "remembered image." What we remember is peculiarly our own, because various distortions occur and change this recall image after the original stimulation has gone. These alterations from the original come from the individual himself, and so the response to an Equivalent must remain a private, untranslatable experience which lies entirely within the individual.¹⁷⁸

Communication by the Equivalent

Any photograph can function as an Equivalent to someone, sometime, someplace. If the individual viewer realizes that for him what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself, if the photograph mirrors something in himself, then his experience is some degree of Equivalence. An Equivalent, tells the viewer in effect, "I had a feeling about something and here is a metaphor of my feeling." What is significant here is that what the photographer had a feeling about was not for the subject he photographed, but for something else. The forms of a cloud may correspond to the

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 172.

photographer's feelings about a certain person and remind him of the person. If the spectator catches in the photograph the same feeling that the photographer experienced, and if the spectator's feelings are similar to the photographer's, then the photographer has aroused a known feeling in him.¹⁷⁹

The power of the Equivalent, as a vehicle of creative expression, lies in the fact that it can convey and evoke feelings about things, situations, and events which for one reason or another cannot be photographed. The Equivalent enables the photographer to use the forms and shapes of objects for their expressive-evocative qualities. The Equivalent does not express the feeling that the photographer had for the object that he photographed; it is the expression of a feeling that lies within the man himself. The plastic material of the visual world is used for the photographer's expressive purposes.¹⁸⁰

Objects or forms can be photographed to obtain an image with specific suggestive powers. In this way, the viewer can be directed into a specific and known feeling state within himself. Materials possessing an infinite variety of forms, such as clouds, water, or ice, can suggest all sorts of emotions, tactile encounters, and intellectual

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 169-70.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 170.

speculations in the spectator. These reactions are formed and supported by the nature of the material but they maintain an independent identity which allows the photographer to choose what he wishes to express.¹⁸¹

The Equivalent permits the photographer to emphasize the transforming power of the medium over its recording power, by causing the subject to stand for something else. It is equally strong; and it permits the photographer to express a feeling or emotion, or to photograph a subject that is un-photogenic. At one level the subject matter of the Equivalent is simply a record, but at another level it may function to arouse certain planned sensations and emotions.¹⁸²

The Equivalent and Coreform

Coreform is a blend of the unique qualities of the object-subject and its inner structure or essence plus the qualities of the photographer. Since the Equivalent externalizes inner states, its scope includes coreform. When there is a rapport between the photographer and an object, metamorphosis can occur to part of himself. The photographer must turn to the Equivalent to externalize what is changed

¹⁸¹White, "Equivalence the Perennial Trend,"
p. 170.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 171.

in himself. The direct record would be a photograph of something or other, but not of his change. A different image in another place and time must be found--which somehow or other when photographed is equivalent to the coreform image.¹⁸³

Private and Public Equivalents

The Equivalent is private if it remains meaningful to the photographer alone. It makes no difference whether it refers to his inner life, the outer world, or to some other world. Publicness in pictures, not only means that the photograph is physically available to other people, but that it can be perceived by a general audience as well. The Public Equivalent is an Equivalent which has been deliberately given form that an audience will understand.¹⁸⁴

The theory of Equivalence gives the photographer a way to use the camera in relation to the mind, heart, and human spirit; but it is necessary to develop a profound understanding of the medium to control the effect of the Equivalent on the audience. With practice, it is possible to predict the equivalent effect of photographs on other persons and to

¹⁸³ Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), II, pp. 173, 321.

¹⁸⁴ Minor White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling,"

evoke known inner states in other people with the known equivalence of photographs. A few photographers, notably Frederick Sommer in Arizona and Paul Caponigro in Massachusetts, are deliberately trying to work from their known feeling states to make photographs which will arouse similar feeling states in others. The predictable use of Equivalence, however, can never be subjected to mass audiences unless those audiences become visually sophisticated.¹⁸⁵

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S STATE OF MIND

To release the shutter in a "seeing" state, makes it possible for the photographer to consciously sum up everything he is at the moment of exposure. Whether the photographer was consciously present or absent at the moment of exposure, shows up very subtly in the photograph. If the photographer is in resonance with the subject at the time a photograph is made, his pictures will seem to radiate his presence.¹⁸⁶

Infinity, IX, 2 (February, 1960), 8, 14.

¹⁸⁵White, "Equivalence the Perennial Trend," p. 175; and White, "Pictorial Photography," XV, 2876.

¹⁸⁶White, "Conscious Photography," II, 80.

Heightened Awareness

It is necessary to make and sustain contact with the subject until a resonance is established between you and the livingness of the object. The details of craftsmanship should be carried out in a low level of intensity, but when all this is done, the photographer should be intensely aware of the object and background. The release of the shutter should occur while holding contact or resonance with the subject. After the exposure, contact is held briefly with the object--then released. If the photographer has employed all of his senses in a sustained contact with the object, he should be able to view the photograph and observe what transformations have occurred. The photograph may or may not differ from what the photographer saw in a state of "heightened awareness." It may or may not be the strongest way of rendering the subject. But, "heightened awareness" will enable the photographer to be intensely aware of the original subject and to compare his perception of it with the photograph.¹⁸⁷

Heightened Awareness does not lead to a loss of spontaneity. One of the aims of Heightened Awareness is to induce

¹⁸⁷White, "Conscious Photography," I, 39-40.

the spontaneous by means of a deliberate, and conscious act. Heightened Awareness teaches the photographer to be so sensitive that he can discriminate between the essence of the object, and what is being projected out of the self. (The photographer projects himself into everything he sees. This is a natural process which the psychologists call "empathy," and it enables the photographer to identify himself with everything in order to know it and feel it better.)¹⁸⁸

The Blank Mind

The state of mind of the photographer while creating should be blank--that is to say, it should be receptive and free from pre-conceptions. The lack of a preconceived idea of how the subject ought to look is essential, since an open mind leads to comprehension and understanding of everything that is seen.

The state of the Blank Mind is not reached automatically; the photographer must make an effort to reach such a condition. White feels that the creative work of the photographer partly consists in putting himself into this state

¹⁸⁸White, "Conscious Photography," II, 9-10; and Minor White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 166.

of mind.¹⁸⁹

White discovered that to photograph with a temporarily blank mind is a way of tapping the unconscious. Moments of revelation or "intuitive recognition" always seemed to emerge from a state of mind which was blank. Depth psychologists say that this brief period of the Blank Mind is when the subconscious mind overrides the surface mind. During that brief moment, when the subconscious mind takes over, we can reach into the subconscious on the one hand and into the visual-tactile universe on the other.¹⁹⁰

THE SEQUENCE AS A CREATIVE FORM

When images are placed side by side, they affect our minds in various ways. Images seem to change when other images are brought beside them because of the phenomenon of "projection." The Sequence enables the photographer to make a visual statement with several images, which when seen together, make a statement that cannot be made by the single photograph.

When photography probes the subconscious mind, it may

¹⁸⁹ White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," pp. 165-66.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 166; and Minor White, "Minor White," Camera, XXXVIII, 8 (August, 1959), 6.

require many fragmentary statements to make a complete statement that we can comprehend. Sequencing allows several photographs to be played against each other until the fragmentary statement of two or more complete each other, or between them say more than either can say alone.¹⁹¹

The Sequence and Cinema

White compares the Sequence to a "cinema of stills." The spectator fills in the time between photographs from himself, from what he can read in the implications of design, from suggestions arising out of the treatment of the Sequence, and from any symbolism that might grow from within the work itself. Chronological time is not important; the sequence may consist of photographs which were made many years and many miles apart.¹⁹²

Subject Matter and the Sequence

Sequences originate from within the photographer. They are an outcome of strong emotions and intense subjective seeing. They are not planned; they are allowed to happen.

¹⁹¹White, "Minor White," XXXVIII, 6; and White, "Conscious Photography," I, 84-85.

¹⁹²White, "Minor White," XXXVIII, 14; and Minor White, "Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), p. 65.

However, the photographer may be able to tell that a Sequence is brewing from the nature of the images, if he lives the message as it unfolds.

A coreform is at the heart of every Sequence, and it is necessary to find the coreform embedded within a growing group of photographs before sequencing can even start. The subject matter of the sequence is not what is visibly rendered. If, for example, rocks were photographed, the subject of the Sequence is not rocks.

. . . While symbols seem to appear, they are barely pointers to significance. The meaning appears in the mood they raise in the beholder; and the flow of the Sequence eddies in the river of his associations as he passes from picture to picture. The rocks are only the objects upon which the significance is spread. . . .¹⁹³

The Sequence Is Analogous to Literature

We can make an analogy between the Sequence and literature. Some photographs are nouns or things, others are verbs or action, adjectives, adverbs, or even punctuation. The individual photograph can be compared to words, small groups of photographs are paragraphs or chapters, and the Sequence is like the novel or epic poem.

¹⁹³White, "Conscious Photography," II, 205-6; and White, "Messages, Mirrors, Manifestations," pp. 65, 69.

The difference lies in the fact that pictures can have many meanings, and intuition is required to discover the right meaning in the context of other images. Intuition is required to put images into context with each other.¹⁹⁴

Types of Sequences

There are two principal kinds of layouts which may be used for the Sequence--Chronological and Non-Chronological. In a Chronological layout, the first picture taken will be the first used. The opening picture should be strong design-wise, and it partly sums up the story. The final photograph sums up and ends the story. There is a chronological story form between the two pictures.

The Non-Chronological Sequence is not dependent upon a time sequence. What is said depends entirely upon the arrangement of the photographs, and there is more latitude in how these stories can be handled. The temptation to put a Sequence into a chronological layout must be carefully considered. The occurrence of the right places and things to photograph ordinarily occurs out of chronological order.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴White, "Conscious Photography," I, 86.

¹⁹⁵White, "Conscious Photography," II, 203-4; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

Sequence Layout

The relative closeness and openness of photographs is a tool by which layout can be made. Generally, two photographs that can stand by themselves should not be side by side. The closed photograph can stand by itself, but the open photograph needs something on both sides to link it in to the Sequence. If the Sequence closes open endedly, the person looking at it should have enough from the images to be able to complete it in his own mind, to his own satisfaction.¹⁹⁶

One useful method of sequencing is to isolate the opening photograph and the terminal photograph and then fill in between. In a way, the first and last photograph seem to set a question and the fill-in photographs provide an answer to that question. The fill-in photographs explain what the Sequence is all about.¹⁹⁷

The spontaneous method of sequencing photographs is to push the pictures around, and then mull them over until they suggest the story by standing out. In this method of sequencing, it is necessary to question the first impact and

¹⁹⁶ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958; and White, "Conscious Photography," I, 112.

¹⁹⁷ White, "Conscious Photography," I, 110.

ask ourselves: Is that really what is there?¹⁹⁸

Another method is to arrange the photographs that belong to a potential sequence into a left to right reading order. A small group of photographs will constitute the essence of the Sequence, and on top of this essential framework we add connective photographs and encourage phrases to develop. As the structure of the Sequence unfolds, we may notice that some pictures are missing. In that case, photographs may have to be made to fit precisely in some gap within the Sequence.¹⁹⁹

Generally, a Sequence consists of phrases. Each phrase has its internal structure and each phrase builds to the ultimate climax and overall meaning. The meaning of each image is less than the meaning of the Sequence as a whole. Each photograph contributes in relation to its place in the series, and each has a fitting place for building up toward the climax.²⁰⁰

The Sequence and an Audience

The creative or psychological structure of a Sequence

¹⁹⁸ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

¹⁹⁹ White, "Conscious Photography," I, 110-11.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

may be experienced all at once--even though the Sequence may not be completed for many months. Once the significance of the subjective coreform is grasped, the Sequence can be completed and polished to make it understandable to an audience. In forming a Sequence, the framework of the structure should be obvious to you, but invisible to anyone else, unless the Sequence is studied to see how it has been structured.²⁰¹

EXPERIENCING THE PHOTOGRAPH

It is important to realize at the outset that a photograph may be a sketch rather than a complete photograph. The "realized" photograph is a clearly stated idea-feeling which can progress by stages out of the photographer's growing awareness and absorption in a place. In the sketch photograph, the idea-feeling is not clearly stated, and it may be necessary for the photographer to re-shoot the first set-up or its equivalent until the sketches lead towards the final complete photograph.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Minor White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 167; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958.

The photograph can serve as an excitant to cause some degree of experience in people. While the photographer cannot erase the implications of the subject from the viewer's mind, he can use the visual relations that are present in the print to serve as the main source of the spectator's feelings. The photographer can purposely strengthen the linkage between the viewer and the subject with representational photographs, or he can weaken it with photographs in which the subject is hardly recognizable or not recognizable at all. But, if the spectator of a photograph has lived an experience which is similar to the idea-feeling of the photograph, the photograph will have the capacity to evoke that idea-feeling in the store of the viewer's images.²⁰³

Physical Procedure for Experiencing Photographs

It is important to make certain that no interruptions will occur that might disturb our efforts to experience a photograph. It is by being still with ourselves, that we can make ourselves receptive to the suggestions coming from the images that well up into the conscious mind from the unconscious.

²⁰³ White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," p. 167; Minor White, Zone System Manual (New York: Morgan & Morgan, Inc., 1961), p. 63; and Minor White, "The Craftsmanship of Feeling," Infinity, IX, 2 (February, 1960), 14.

The photograph should be placed in a position where it is free from distracting backgrounds, where the lighting is good, and where the spectator can sit comfortably erect with his body and shoulders square to the picture. The spectator should relax prior to the crucial moment when he first engages the image. When changes occur in the image, the work period may begin. These changes may vary with the individual. For some, the perception of space in depth within the image suddenly increases. Others will experience changes in the brightness or size of the image.²⁰⁴

The active work of experiencing a photograph consists in scanning the image until everything in the photograph has been seen and noted. The spectator should become acquainted with each object, with every detail within the photograph, and with the relationships between objects and the space they inhabit. When all of the relationships within the photograph have been observed, the spectator should bring his technical knowledge and philosophies about the medium to bear on the image. The spectator analyzes composition with the surface

²⁰⁴ Minor White, "Extended Perception Through Photography and Suggestion," Ways of Growth, eds. Herbert A. Otto and John Mann. An anthology of approaches to expanding awareness (New York: Grossman Publishers, Inc., 1968), pp. 37-38; and Minor White, "A Method More Active than Passive," Aperture, VII, 2 (1959), 60.

mind; with intuition he feels the relation of the composition to the picture content. The spectator can establish empathy with the image by using his imagination to project himself into the various objects within the photograph.²⁰⁵

At the end of the work period the state of stillness is turned off in brief steps. A final impression of the image should be taken before we look elsewhere. Then, the experience should be held on to in silence. The various things which have been seen and noted should be reviewed as related visuals.²⁰⁶

Procedure for the Analysis of Photographs

One should first feel the emotional significance of a photograph and then use intellectual analysis to bear out or disprove these feelings. To look at a photograph with a predisposed mind, may blind us as to what the photograph says. This method of print analysis is based on the contemplation of visible relationships as well as intellectual and emotional meanings. All of the visible occurrences in a photograph can be analyzed for what they are. The various concepts,

²⁰⁵White, "A Method More Active than Passive," VII, 60.

²⁰⁶White, "Extended Perception Through Photography and Suggestion," p. 40.

such as light quality and space, have a bearing on the mood of a picture as well as a profound effect on the meaning of the photograph. Although many concepts and elements overlap and combine to establish the mood of a photograph, they can be isolated in order to describe their functional effect on the picture. For example, if we can disassociate in our minds the light occurring in the print, from the subject of the print, the light itself can be felt to have an effect on the total mood.²⁰⁷

Concepts are useful only to get at the significance of a photograph. The important thing is to identify the idea-feeling of the photographer and to understand what it is the photographer is saying. If the photograph is emotionally a blank, deliberate analysis of the various concepts may help us to perceive the significance of the photograph.

Reading a photograph may be based on what it reminds you of. It is a verbalization of your experience of a photograph. The process of reading a photograph converts a non-verbal experience into a verbal one. Non-verbal communication

²⁰⁷ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956; and Minor White, "Analysis of Five Prints," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels. An anthology of articles on photography (New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), p. 33.

does not involve the spoken word. It may be conscious or unconscious. It may be made by gestures or through the meaning of objects themselves. It may use signs and symbolism.²⁰⁸

Readings of photo-journalistic work should generally be done as "non-verbal" communication. Readings of pictorial photographs should generally be done in the light of the subject, and how the photographer has used the subject matter. The reason for reading a photograph is that it enables us to understand what is going on in the photograph technique wise and communication wise.²⁰⁹

Any photograph that communicates does so because a person is reading it. The process of reading a photograph can be an intellectual effort, an intuitive one, or a combination of both. To make a "reading," verbalization is necessary. One has to speak or write about one's experience of a photograph. In the process of translating a visual experience into verbal expression, slips are bound to occur and so verbalizing should be done only after the photograph is experienced and it should be done only if there is

²⁰⁸ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1956.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

sufficient reason.²¹⁰

A photograph must be "read" without criticism. When we dislike a photograph, we immediately shut off any further communication. When we like a photograph, we are pleased to carry on a relationship with it through an interchange of visual and verbal symbols. Once evaluation is suspended, one can concentrate on the significance of the picture.

The critic develops ways of withholding judgment long enough to find what is going on in the picture. Analysis may be used to keep the conscious mind busy so that the intuitive side of the man can go to work. Often the critic will bring a whole system of analysis to bear in order to free the intuitive forces within himself. He keeps his attention on the visuals of a picture without losing sight of the significance.²¹¹

It is important to decide whether the photograph is documentary, pictorial, informational, or some other kind of photograph. There are appropriate methods for experiencing each type of photograph. The informational photograph can be read for the information it contains in a special field, and

²¹⁰ Minor White, "What Is Meant by Reading Photographs?," Aperture, V, 2 (1957), 48.

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

it can be read pictorially if we bypass information and observe its aesthetic qualities. In the case of the pictorial photograph, we isolate those associations which seem to pertain to the photograph. The graphics, the design, and all the other visual concepts are the means to tell another person about the photograph's pertinent associations.²¹²

Empathy and Projection

The projection of human qualities during the contemplation of a photograph is an active lead into experiencing pictures. A photograph may suggest faces or other parts of human anatomy, and if the spectator is not able to catch a fairly obvious visual suggestion, it may indicate a person who is temperamentally incapable of contemplation. The next step from seeing faces and anatomy is to see personality. The step beyond the projection of personality is the projection of spirit and the receiving of spirit during the period when a photograph is contemplated. The process of empathy, or "feeling into" a photograph with the muscles, bones and flesh, is an active way of responding to pictures. The energy that is directed to the picture by projection comes back by empathy. The danger lies in cutting active empathy off before

²¹²Minor White and Walter Chappell, "Some Methods for Experiencing Photographs," Aperture, V, 4 (1957), 157, 168-69.

the spirit of the photograph has been perceived.²¹³

Associations and the Subconscious

When the camera has moved in so close to a familiar object that it becomes unfamiliar, the photograph must be experienced through the associations that run between the subconscious and surface mind. The associations should be sorted out and the ones that seem to pertain to the photograph isolated. The spectator should let associations rise within himself, and ask: What do the various parts of the photograph remind me of--visually? What does the picture as a whole suggest? Associations may lead us far away from what is obviously part of the picture content; but no harm is done, because part of the experience of a photograph is sorting out all the associations a picture arouses in us to find the one which is the most pertinent to the picture and to ourselves.²¹⁴

Characteristics of the Experience

What you find in a photograph will be your own. There is not a right answer and many wrong ones. There are as many

²¹³White, "A Method More Active than Passive," VII, 52-54.

²¹⁴Ibid., pp. 56, 60-61; and White and Chappell, "Some Methods for Experiencing Photographs," V, 167-68.

right answers as there are persons who contemplate the picture, and the only wrong answer is no experience at all. Whether the more active or more passive method is used, the result of the contemplation is to be experience. This may happen through a flame burst of understanding, or it may occur after the picture has been lived with for some period of time. A photograph may be engaged casually by the subconscious mind for weeks or months before it is set up as a target for intense concentration. During this time the unconscious engages the photograph in its own way, and all of the various things that are present in the photograph provide a rich feast for the subconscious mind.²¹⁵

The Experience and Communication

No one can predict what another person will experience when he reads a photograph. The experience must be accepted for what it is. Moreover, once the surface meaning of a photograph is identified it takes concentration and discipline to read a photograph.²¹⁶

²¹⁵White, "A Method More Active than Passive," VII, 56; White, "What Is Meant by Reading Photographs?," V, 49; and Minor White, "A Psychological Explanation of Contemplation," Aperture, VII, 2 (1959), 61.

²¹⁶White, "Extended Perception Through Photography and Suggestion," p. 36; and Minor White, "The Light Sensitive Mirage," Aperture, VI, 2 (1958), 47.

Many people see themselves in photographs, and most of us see what we wish to see in a photograph, or anything else except what is actually present. Projection and empathy lead us to see something of ourselves almost automatically in anything that we look at long enough to be aware of. The photograph, therefore, invariably functions as a mirror of at least some part of the viewer. Many persons looking at a photograph see something of themselves before they see anything else. Some degree of mirroring happens with any photograph, but it is especially strong with the non-literal or stylized photograph. Mirroring is also strong in photographs where the presence of design is equal to or stronger than the sense of the presence of the subject in front of the camera. When subject matter is rendered in an obscure or ambiguous fashion, we invent a subject for it. What we invent is derived from ourselves, and the photograph becomes a mirror of some part of ourselves.²¹⁷

Many contemporary photographers, notably Frederick Sommer, present images that are intended to cause the viewer to see something of himself. The photograph causes the

²¹⁷ Minor White, "Equivalence the Perennial Trend," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), pp. 173-74.

viewer to be confronted with something of himself. If what he sees is unpleasant, some part of himself may be unpleasant. If what he sees is magnificent, it is because something beautiful in him has been magnified.²¹⁸

The creative photographer must practice the most conscious criticism. Is what he saw present in the photograph? If not, does the photograph reveal something he could not see by himself? He must either be willing to take the responsibility for the accident and show it as his own, or consider it as a sketch for his subconscious to digest. Furthermore, he needs to study the reactions of the viewers: Do they match his own? come close? or depart in some other direction? Visual communication demands conscious criticism and an understanding of what the prints do, as compared to what we want them to do.²¹⁹

BLOCKS TO UNDERSTANDING

Having a feeling, and photographing what causes that feeling, is no assurance that others will experience a similar

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 175.

²¹⁹ Minor White, "The Camera Mind and Eye," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 168.

feeling in the reading of a photograph. A person can read his own photographs rather deeply, but it is questionable whether one can do so to the photographs of another photographer. Secondly, most people will either not read a photograph, or else they will read it as a mirror of themselves. Only the trained critic will be more objective and analyze the photograph for itself. This is done by drawing a tight line between interpretation and what one actually sees in the photograph.²²⁰

Instant Criticism

Immediate value judgments are the prime factor in preventing involvement with photographs. We must be prepared to postpone judgment of "good," "bad," "like," or "dislike," until later. The actions that these words call up destroy any possibility of extending our perception while working with a picture.²²¹

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 167; Minor White, "Analysis of Five Prints," Universal Photo Almanac, ed. Ralph Samuels. An anthology of articles on photography (New York: Falk Publishing Company, Inc., 1951), p. 36; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

²²¹ White, "Extended Perception Through Photography and Suggestion," p. 37.

Plain Sense of the Image

Sometimes, whether or not we experience a photograph depends upon our recognition of the subject photographed. There are literal minded and design ignorant people--design conscious and sympathetic viewers--non-literal or symbolic minded people, and photographs can range from the literal image where the subject is unmistakable to the ambiguous or non-literal image.²²²

Wrong Anticipations and Misreading Facts

If a viewer identifies the original subject of an ambiguous photograph incorrectly, obviously he is off on the wrong track. Even if he can verbalize profusely about the photograph, he will misread it. A lack of life experiences is the main reason that young persons are prone to misread images, but unfamiliar objects generally need captions to get the viewer off on the right track.

Wrong anticipations have a high frequency among viewers. The person who demands that any photograph be of people will find it impossible to fully experience the landscape. The person who believes that all photographs

²²²Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), I, 129-30.

should be beautiful will be blind to those that are not. Preconceptions and high standards of perfection prevent involvement with images that fall below an arbitrary standard.²²³

Memory Jogs

Our involvement with images is based on associations and past experiences. Frequently an image will serve as a memory jog to form associations that lead the viewer away from the picture and into his past life. The photographer can predict neither the specific memory jog nor its effect on a particular viewer. When the train of associations leads the viewer into the realm of past memories that have no bearing on the image, both the picture and the photographer are lost.

If the viewer keeps his attention on the image, universal associations will prevail that are common to both the viewer and photographer. It is only when the viewer attends to the image at hand, that the photographer has a chance to make valid predictions of the viewer's potential experience of the photograph.²²⁴

Compulsive Reactions

A person in a state of identification with something

²²³ Ibid., p. 130.

²²⁴ Ibid., pp. 130-31.

can twist almost any image into a mirror of his or her own inner state. The process is somewhat like the train of associations set off by the memory jog; except that it leads into the present. As with the memory jog, the photographer can never hope to predict experience when this interference occurs.²²⁵

Stock Answers

Cliches or stock answers reveal a poor imagination on the part of the viewer and sidetrack involvement with the image. The most original image in the world can elicit stock answers from a person who has not been able to make contact with the photograph.²²⁶

Verbalizing

A form of talking that is a substitute for any contact with the image. It is monotonous, unrelated to the content of the image, and closely related to stock answers.²²⁷

Doctrinal Adhesions

A person's stand in relation to religion, politics, schools of art, or fields of photography, etc., can be a strong barrier to involvement with images.²²⁸

²²⁵Ibid., p. 131.

²²⁶Ibid.

²²⁷Ibid., p. 132.

²²⁸Ibid.

Sentimentality

An interference, on a par with doctrinal adhesions, that practically blinds the viewer to what the image says.²²⁹

Inhibitions

Personal and emotional tie-ups are generally unpredictable. Inhibitions not only affect a person's life, they affect his acceptance of images. In an apparently random way, they determine the viewer's acceptance or rejection of certain kinds of photographs. Inhibitions in life are carried over to looking at images in photography, and they have a similar effect on response as prejudices and preconceptions.²³⁰

Feelings of Inadequacy

Feelings of inadequacy occur when there is a feeling that the photo image in question has a "right" answer, or a specific meaning, and the person is afraid to make a mistake. There may be a variety of causes, including: a real inability to verbalize, a determination to keep the visual experience free of verbal entanglements, or simply a failure to get involved and a reluctance to admit that no reaction has taken place.²³¹

²²⁹White, "Conscious Photography," I, 132.

²³⁰Ibid. ²³¹Ibid., p. 133.

Apathy

There may be a refusal to get involved with something that "does not turn us on." This block can be overcome by willful "turning on" by the viewer himself.²³²

Either-Or

Either-or thinking sabotages seeing because pet theories can make us think that no other kind of image is fit for anything. It is a trap that critics frequently fall into.²³³

Avoidance of the Issue When Under Pressure

This commonly occurs in a classroom, workshop, or interview situation, when a person is expected to externalize his experience. Avoidance takes place when the viewer must say something, but there is little or no involvement with the image. The spectator may: describe the subject, describe and criticize the composition, and describe or question the technique. Technical questions are a standard reaction. Sometimes, the viewer wants to find out how the image was made in order to later go out and do the same. The description may mask angers aroused because the spectator is

²³² Ibid., pp. 19, 133.

²³³ Ibid., p. 133.

forced to observe his failure to make contact with the image, or the spectator may describe the obvious because he is afraid of making mistakes. Saying, "I like it" without elaboration is another form of avoidance.²³⁴

Emotional Blocks Through Analysis

It is important to guard against emotional blocks which can occur when intellectual analysis takes place. Responses may be emotional as well as intellectual. It is possible for an image to hold something for the spectator intellectually and be an emotional blank.²³⁵

TYPES OF RESPONSES AND WHAT THEY INDICATE

The study and evaluation of responses is a means by which the photographer can go outside of himself and study the effect of a photograph on other people. By evaluating the implications of a response, the photographer is able to really get an insight into other people so that he is in a better position to communicate with them. Response evaluation serves as a feedback technique for the photographer.

²³⁴Ibid., p. 135.

²³⁵Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Spring, 1957.

The fact that a rapport between the photographer and his subject has been recorded, does not insure a response in others. Response evaluation can show how little a picture has actually communicated, or it can reveal things we never saw in our own photographs.²³⁶

The matter of responses and their meaning is a complex study. A response can be physical, emotional, associational, or intellectual. It can also be on more than one level at once. The key to the study has been found to be reducible to the axiom: when people talk about pictures they talk about themselves first and the picture next if at all. Responding to a visual experience is largely a matter of getting rid of blocks and inhibitions that stand in the way of freely experiencing what is before us. If the photographer can recognize an emotional block in himself, he will understand it and know when it occurs in others because he will already have understood it within himself.²³⁷

²³⁶ Minor White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," Aperture, X, 3 (1962), 117; Minor White, "Minor White," Camera, XXXVIII, 8 (August, 1959), 17; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 8, 1962.

²³⁷ White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 117-19; statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology,

The Identification of Subject Matter

The identification of subject matter is the lowest common denominator of a response to a photograph. A meaningful experience with a photograph requires some degree of imagination on the spectator's part if there is to be an interaction between the photograph and the viewer of the photograph. At best, a photograph is a step towards a mental image, and it is the mental image evoked in another person by which photography communicates.²³⁸

Multivalence

"Multivalence" is a term that refers to the possibility of more than one meaning or interpretation to the same response. For example, "I like it" can mean many things. The person may be inarticulate, the photograph may not offend him in any way, or he may really like it. When the response is multivalent, the photographer encounters the problem of what to do with the response. Right at the beginning he is faced with the problem of how well an individual verbalizes

February 8, 1962; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961.

²³⁸ Minor White, "To Recapture the Innocence of Vision," Aperture, VI, 2 (1958), 55.

his response.²³⁹

The Person Who Doesn't Want To Do Self-Searching

This person either has no imagination or is deliberately blinding himself to visual experiences that might disturb his basic security. The full range of photographic possibilities of communication-evocation is a closed world to him.²⁴⁰

Oblivious Response

Some persons react as if they had never seen the picture they are looking at. These individuals would probably give substantially the same response to any photograph. Any photograph would mirror back to them whatever mild compulsion was uppermost at the time.²⁴¹

Verbalization

Verbalizing is a means of escape from life and it indicates that the spectator is avoiding contact with certain

²³⁹White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 118.

²⁴⁰Minor White, "Equivalence the Perennial Trend," Photographers on Photography, ed. Nathan Lyons. An anthology of critical source material by photographers (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 174.

²⁴¹White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 119.

or all forms of life as they are represented in a photograph. Verbalization is full of cliches and indicates a lack of contact with the image.²⁴²

Rejection

When the photograph is independent of the original subject, the viewer may reject the photograph because he can't identify the original subject or he may willingly engage the photograph because it is an event in its own right. Photographs in which the subject is hard to identify separate viewers into two groups: those who are offended at being denied subject identification and reject the photograph--and a second group of sophisticated viewers who will accept the photograph for its own sake.

The subject-recognizable photograph separates an audience into classes along different lines. The literal photograph separates the people-oriented from the nature lovers. The viewer who is a purist will tend to prefer the representational photograph. White has found that the literal photograph acts as a kind of bridge from the viewer back to the original subject and the non-literal acts more

²⁴²White, "Conscious Photography," I, 144-45.

as a direct source of experience.²⁴³

Responses can be classified as Negative, Neutral, and Pertinent. A negative or neutral response may turn into a pertinent one even while a person is talking about a photograph. If there is a lapse of time between seeing the photograph and the attempt to verbalize, a change of response is common. The response change of pertinent to neutral or negative is less likely to happen.

Negative responses prevent the viewer from understanding any statement a photograph might possibly communicate or any feeling it might evoke. However, White warns that this must be taken as a general statement because some people seem to take a delight in photographs that they hate. No one will remember pictures to which they are indifferent.²⁴⁴

No Comment

This response often indicates a lack of sensitivity, at least to the photograph in question. The same response to a number of photographs may indicate either a lack of

²⁴³White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 116; and Minor White, "Pictorial Photography," The Encyclopedia of Photography (1964), XV, 2877.

²⁴⁴White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 119.

sensitivity to visual matters or an inarticulate but visual-minded individual. This type of person may be able to express himself with gestures or pencil and paper drawings. Sometimes a drawing together with a few words will reveal the spectator's thoughts or a state of feeling.²⁴⁵

I Like It-I Don't Like It

This indicates an incapacity to communicate verbally, or it can indicate a lack of sensitivity on the part of the individual. This response may or may not be true, because the spectator may feel he has to make some kind of response and so he takes the easiest way out. If he tells you he likes it, he may think your photograph is better or he may be trying to make you happy.

If a person rejects a photograph, he closes his mind to further traffic with that image. If the photographer can discover the reasons, they usually provide the photographer with information. Sometimes the photographer is not at fault. The reasons may have little or no connection with the photograph.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 119-20; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961.

I Just Love It

This reaction usually indicates that the image has triggered the individual into remembering some former state of euphoria. The phrase is often followed by a glowing account of the remembered event.²⁴⁷

The Changers

Persons who would have taken it differently, or indicate that it should be cropped differently, rarely see the photograph as a statement by another person. The changer either substitutes some problem of his own, or finds his own photograph within the picture. He seldom responds to the picture itself.

This is not really a response but a return to the original subject. The spectator is not responding to what the photograph says, but he is using wrong material for what he would like to say. The important question is this: Is the spectator changing the photograph because he would like to make it into his picture, or is he changing it to clarify what the photographer is trying to say? This is a fascinating response to watch because of what the changer reveals

²⁴⁷White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 120.

about himself.²⁴⁸

The Bluffers

A person may feel compelled to say something about a given photograph because he has agreed beforehand to do so. Stock answers, such as "life and death" or "old and new" may appear out of desperation or when a person is indifferent to a particular photograph.

If a person is a habitual bluffer, the response may be interesting because it takes considerable intelligence to talk one's way through a photograph in a convincing manner. Sometimes the bluffer's response may be pertinent to the photographer because the bluffer may inadvertently cause a moment of understanding for the photographer. On other occasions, as the bluffer talks what comes off the top of his head may lead him toward understanding something about the photograph.²⁴⁹

It's Been Done Before

A person who has had a considerable experience with

²⁴⁸ Ibid.; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961.

²⁴⁹ White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 120.

photographs may reject a photograph that is less successful than others that he is reminded of, or because it reminds him of a class of photographs that he has long wearied of or otherwise rejected. If the attitude denies the viewer entry into the photograph it is a negative response; if the discussion points out the correspondence to previous photographs, it may be a neutral response. This response ordinarily comes from persons with considerable experience with photographs, either in a given field such as advertising or news, or an individual with a wide historical knowledge of photographs.²⁵⁰

Neutral Responses

If a photographer consistently inspires this kind of response, he should seriously consider some other form of self-expression or find another group of persons for his audience. This response indicates that communication is not taking place.²⁵¹

Literal Description

The individual describes the picture part by part or stops with the identification of objects. For such persons, identification usually ends the experience of a photograph. The person who counts objects in a photograph frequently

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

fails to observe the relationships. Once a photograph has been pigeonholed in this manner, the door to further exploration of the photograph is closed. Literal description indicates that no communication has taken place between a photographer and his audience. The spectator has only seen what he can or wants to see.²⁵²

Technical Analysis

Technical analysis, like literal description, indicates a lack of communication between a photographer and his audience. Technical discussion avoids the necessity of making contact with what the photograph reports or evokes. Bluffers sometimes resort to this.²⁵³

Description of Graphic Design

This response generally comes from persons with art and design training, and it can be an avoidance of the pertinent meanings of a photograph as much as can a literal or technical description. On the other hand, some photographs offer little more than graphic design to an audience. In such cases, a discussion of design and composition is

²⁵² Ibid., p. 121; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961.

²⁵³ Ibid.

pertinent and appropriate.²⁵⁴

The Historical Viewpoint

Seeing the photograph in question against other photographs may or may not be a neutral response. It is neutral if comparisons are made on an intellectual level to the exclusion of the emotional level, or if the comparisons are a way of avoiding the humanistic statement of the photograph in question. "To some persons," says White, "pure form is as meaningful and emotional as significant form is to others." Responses in this category are always useful to the photographer because they are informational.²⁵⁵

Pertinent Responses

Profound and effective involvements with photographs lead to pertinent responses. This kind of response goes beyond rejection and superficial visual conversations with photographs. The spectator who makes a pertinent response finds some kind of symbol of his own personal experience in the photograph and relates himself to it. The response pertains to both the photograph and the spectator.

The tangibles, such as tone values, composition,

²⁵⁴White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 121.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

design relationships and the various photographic concepts are relevant. They are the only safe and secure ground upon which verbalizing can take place. But, because people also respond to the intangible qualities of a photograph, they are also a part of the pertinent response. White writes:

. . . The actual nature of most pertinent responses escapes either verbalization or visualizing by gesture or sketches. Therefore, about all the photographer can hope for are clues to the fact that the individual is experiencing the photograph. . . .²⁵⁶

Sense of Presence

When the spectator relates the subject of a photograph to its surroundings, he is beginning to have a response with the picture. He is beginning to get involved with it. Responses require a curiosity, on the part of the spectator, as to what is behind a picture--a curiosity as to: when, where, and how it was taken--or a discussion of the mood of the place, event, or the individual. These curiosities, on the part of the spectator, indicate an involvement with the picture and therefore some response.

The spectator may feel that he is in the presence of

²⁵⁶Ibid., p. 121; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961.

some place, person, event, or mystery. Sometimes the feeling of presence takes the form of speculating on how the photographer felt while he was in the presence of a place or an event. In other cases, tactile sensations are aroused by the photograph, and our response can be related to the tactile imagery which the photograph evokes. For example, the textures seen in a photograph of bark or sand may arouse the appropriate sensations in the hands of the viewer.²⁵⁷

Deduction from Visible Clues

Two broad classes of photographs can be set up: those pictures that transform the subject and those which represent recognizable subject matter. Some factual photographs ask questions which the viewer can answer from the information provided in the photograph. When this happens, the spectator may attempt to sort out the implications of the photographic facts. The spectator has to engage the photograph in order to locate an answer, and so an interchange takes place between him and the photographic illusion of subjects and their relationships. The spectator of the photograph may wonder: who

²⁵⁷ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961; and White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 122.

lived in this house or what kind of person lives behind
this face?²⁵⁸

Recognition of an Immediate Symbolism

The identification of standard symbols, where they
are actually present, indicates a relevant and pertinent
response. A photograph may depend on a long established sym-
bol, but sometimes it will function as a new statement of a
universal feeling.²⁵⁹

Conversion

Conversion into signs and symbols bring involvement
not with the object but with the symbol of the object. There
can be real involvement if the symbol is not merely a cliché.
Otherwise, these have a tendency to be standardized
responses.²⁶⁰

Anthropomorphizing

The projection of human characteristics to an image
can be irrelevant, however, one must engage a photograph long

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs,"
X, 122.

²⁶⁰ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on
Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology,
December 7, 1961.

enough to do it. Anthropomorphizing indicates that a response is happening.

Anthropomorphizing occurs when we see faces in rocks or parking meters, and when people project such human qualities as courage, anger, love, hope, or spirit, etc. The anthropomorphized forms rarely match the feeling evoked by the rest of the picture. Generally, they bear a relation to the viewer's own personality. This response is common when the subject of a photograph is ambiguous or cannot be identified.²⁶¹

The Photograph as a Source of Experience

In the extreme case, where the original subject has been completely transformed, the viewer has to invent his own subject for it or else be able to respond to "pure form" for its own sake. The spectator may: anthropomorphize, thereby making kinesthetic and physical projections into the photograph; respond to the photograph as though it were a memory trigger for immediate associations; use the photograph as a mirror of the self; or use the photograph to project into the photographer's experience and/or personality. These responses indicate that something is going on, but they can

²⁶¹ Ibid.; and Minor White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 122.

be irrelevant as far as the photograph is concerned. They can also be thorough and objective responses.²⁶²

Exploration of the Mirror Nature of Photographs

Any response is a projection of the inner-self to some degree. The spectator, who has the curiosity to explore the mirror nature of photographs, can use the photograph to see a manifestation of his own inner workings. The photographer has to have a considerable knowledge of both himself and other people before he will be able to distinguish between an abnormal psychological response, and a response which reveals something pertinent about the spectator and the photograph.²⁶³

Responses as if the Photograph Were an Equivalent

When the spectator becomes aware that the image directs his attention outwardly into the world, he may experience a relationship of himself to the universe. The photographer may not be able to see even a clue to the experience.²⁶⁴

Intellectual Responses

An intellectual response means that there is an

²⁶²White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 122.

²⁶³Ibid., p. 123.

²⁶⁴Ibid.

intellectual process functioning in the mind of the viewer. If you look at a photograph and are made instantly aware of the composition, size, and shape relationships, the photograph may in effect be suggesting that this is the way you should look at it. When this is so, one could attempt to respond to it on an intellectual basis.²⁶⁵

EVALUATION OF THE RESPONSE

To communicate feelings with photography, it is necessary to first know something about the photograph. A photograph must be thoroughly comprehended before it can be put in relation to some other experience or feeling. It must be understood before it can be used in various contexts and for various purposes. A photograph cannot function as an Equivalent for a particular poem, or as an advertisement for a product, if the idea-feeling is not the same.²⁶⁶

If the photographer's response indicates that certain feelings are present, others may be able to respond similarly.

²⁶⁵ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 8, 1962.

²⁶⁶ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, Fall, 1958; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, December 7, 1961.

It is important to understand how a photograph makes us feel to understand how it will affect others, and it is important to know something about the individual who is going to see a particular photograph. A knowledgeable photographer should know the scope of what he can do with a photograph and when to use a particular type of photograph. Non-objective photographs, for example, can set off free associations that the spectator may want to repress because they are painful for one reason or another. Thus, a photograph can lead the audience into areas that they don't want to see.²⁶⁷

The Study of One's Own Photographs

If the photographer studies his own photograph until he has seen everything present, he is in a better position to predict the possible responses of other people. The potentials within the photograph include: facts, relationships, what the photograph reminds you of, and the whole range of where the image reaches you. That is to say, whether the response is through the intellect, the emotions, or physical sensations.

White describes how the photographer can isolate

²⁶⁷ Statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 18, 1962.

additional features of the photograph for study with drawn overlays:

. . . The two dimensional surface of any photograph has certain large space divisions caused by the distribution of lights and darks. These main divisions can be drawn on a piece of transparent paper laid over the photograph. The overlay is taken off and studied independently of the photograph. Separate overlays can be made for still other patterns; for example, the pattern formed by the blacks and dark values treated together. Likewise the separate patterns formed by isolating the middle gray values, or the light values, or the textural distribution. . . .²⁶⁸

The photographer, in studying and responding to these isolated aspects of the photograph, should allow the overlays to touch his suggestibility, his sensations, his intellect, and his emotions, singly or all together. Sometimes the responses are the same as was aroused by the photograph as a whole, but sometimes completely different feelings will appear.²⁶⁹

Collation of Photographer's Experiences

By the study of sketches and overlays the photographer can come up with more associative, emotional, kinesthetic and intellectual responses in himself. No matter how strange, irrelevant, or alike the responses may be they are converted

²⁶⁸ White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 125.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

into words or sketches. New responses are added to the list made from the photograph itself. This kind of extension is useful, because no matter how "way out" a response may seem to the photographer, it is likely that some spectator will have the same response to the photograph. By arming himself with a long list of possible responses, the photographer is in a position to say that he can predict the responses of a group of people, though not of individual people.²⁷⁰

Collation of Viewer's Experiences with Your Own

To collate the viewer experience data with your own, key words or key phrases can be lifted from each viewer's experience. The key words should be divided into two groups: those which correspond to your own key words and phrases and those which are different.

It is exceedingly important to write down and observe the experiences which are unlike your own. It is a natural tendency to forget, overlook, or never hear experiences that differ from what we want to see or hear. But, the inter-viewer must be especially on the lookout for unique and rare reactions and responses to a photograph. Finally, conclusions

²⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 126-27.

should be drawn and written out as clearly as possible.²⁷¹

Prediction of Visual Experience

The photographer can control and predict the visual experience of the spectator insofar as he can evoke known feeling states in other people. He can make a photograph that appeals predominantly to the emotional, intellectual, or the kinesthetic-tactile side of an audience; but he has no assurance that others will experience the photograph fully. Even if the photograph corresponds to an idea-feeling that the spectator or viewer of the photograph has experienced, blocks may occur which prevent any understanding of the image.²⁷²

Nevertheless, advanced creativity in photography lies in affecting changes in the inner state of the viewer's mind by means of the photographic image. These changes are predictable to the extent that: the photographer comprehends the photograph fully, understands his own response, and

²⁷¹ Minor White, "Conscious Photography" (unpublished treatise, Arlington, Massachusetts, October, 1968), I, 128.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 142; White, "Varieties of Responses to Photographs," X, 117-19, 127; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, February 8, 1962.

understands the nature of the picture audience.²⁷³

Evaluation of Photographs

A photograph creates a mental image within a person, which in turn leads to change or metamorphoses. Evaluation is the act of deciding whether a photographic image depletes or nourishes in the course of producing this change. If the photograph nourishes, it is good. If it depletes or takes away, it is bad. Nourishing photographs are always exciting and moving. They produce a change of psychological state towards power, euphoria, warmth, floating, or love. Depleting photographs create such overwhelmingly negative reactions as: anger, conflict, fear, annoyance, pride, or vanity.²⁷⁴

A good photograph evokes responses rather than reactions within the viewer. It is a photograph which makes appropriate use of the image, and nourishes rather than depletes. The photographer who is capable of creating this kind of an image is able to respond to the world around him and able to make an audience respond. He must bear

²⁷³White, "Conscious Photography," I, 143; and statement by Minor White during a lecture on Visual Communications, Rochester Institute of Technology, January 18, 1962.

²⁷⁴White, "Conscious Photography," II, 239, 259-62, 266.

responsibility to himself, to his medium, and to his audience. Likewise, an audience that is a good or creative one, must bear responsibility to itself, to the medium, and to the photographer. It should make an effort to respond to a photograph rather than to react.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 268.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

There are few significant differences in the photographic concepts held by Stieglitz, Weston, Adams, and White. The principal fact that has come out of this study is that the theories of the four photographers are tied to similar basic philosophies about the medium. Many of the concepts were held in common by all of the photographers; other concepts were developed as a natural outgrowth of ideas which were already in existence. Still others were developed as the result of an individual's own personal aesthetic approach to the medium.

Photography as an Art Form

Stieglitz, Weston, Adams, and White used photography as an art form by accepting the fact that photography is a unique medium with its own characteristics and limitations. Each photographer analyzed the characteristics of the medium, accepted them, and then went on to use these characteristics to serve his creative self-expression. Craftsmanship was thoroughly mastered to make self-expression as complete a

creative experience as possible.

Ansel Adams wrote that the only relationship that can be firmly established between Stieglitz, Weston, White, and himself relates to a common effort to work in the domain of straight photography with expressive intention.¹ All four photographers are quite different in their basic aesthetic expression and style. Adams feels that he is closer to Weston in the physical sense of technique and materials; but that he is closer to Stieglitz in the spiritual approach. In Adams' opinion, White is more concerned with the extreme subjective approach than any of the other three; but all have given some compelling aesthetic direction to their creative effort.²

Straight Photography

All four photographers realized that the photographer must understand and master his medium before he can use photography to serve his aesthetic aims. Stieglitz realized that photography has its own unique characteristics, different from those of any other medium, and the creative photographer

¹Letter from Ansel Adams to the writer, dated at Los Angeles, California, February 18, 1968.

²Ibid.

must accept these limitations for what they are. He knew that photography and painting had to be treated as two separate mediums; but he did not develop this concept to the extent that Weston did. Weston made a comprehensive study of the unique characteristics of the medium, and his theories led to a better understanding of the nature and capabilities of photography.

Straight Photography and Previsualization

Straight Photography led in turn to the concept of Previsualization. The precise control that the Zone System makes possible, gave Adams and White a control over the medium that Stieglitz and Weston did not have. Weston previsualized what the subject would look like in the final print, but his method was intuitive and based upon experience rather than upon applied sensitometry. Later, White extended the concept of Straight Photography to include modern characteristics of the medium which have been brought under the photographer's control.

Previsualization

Stieglitz, later in his career, turned away from corrective handwork on the photograph. He realized that the photographer must have a clear idea of what he is doing and what he wants to do. Weston stated that because

photography is an instantaneous process, the photographer must learn to visualize the final result in advance. Technical procedures must be predetermined to carry out that visualization.

The concept was further refined with the advent of the Zone System. Absolute control over the medium is of course impossible, but the Zone System gives the photographer absolute control within the framework of the medium's characteristics and limitations. The System was an outgrowth of Adams' philosophy that the photographer must have the ability to previsualize the final result as well as the technical capability to achieve it. The objective of the System is to enable the photographer to obtain the particular tone values which he desires in the final print.

White mastered the Zone System and used the System as a discipline by which he could carry out his creative intentions. He demonstrated through his photography that the photographer could use the Zone System creatively, and that the concept of previsualization is not self-limiting. The photographer can previsualize every potential in a given scene and select the one that best suits his purpose.

Essence vs. Projection

None of the photographers attempted to project

personal preconceptions upon the subject. Stieglitz and White believed that the subject must somehow take over. They used the subject's essence as an equivalent to express some inner state or feeling. Weston spoke many times of recording the very quintessence of the subject, and Adams described his attempts to express the essence of the subject without emotional or symbolic connotations.

It is necessary to understand, however, that an object can have more than one essential quality or essence. A rock can be both hard and mysterious. One cloud can be soft and lyrical; another, dynamic and threatening. Furthermore, everyone perceives differently, and what the photographer feels to be the essential qualities of the subject may not necessarily be the same as what others perceive to be its essence. White's concept of the "Blank Mind" is a useful tool which can guide the photographer in his attempt to avoid projection; because it leads the photographer into making contact with the subject, but it prevents him from forcing his preconceptions upon it.

The Photographer's Response to Subject Matter

Stieglitz and White used photography to express their feelings about life. The subject was used as a symbol to

express the photographer's feelings about life and an inner state of mind. For Stieglitz and White, subject matter was not significant in itself; it was only significant as a symbolic metaphor of the idea-feeling which it represented. Subject matter was used as a means to arouse associations in the mind of the spectator.

Weston went beyond the documentation of subject matter to the extent that he revealed the significance of what was before his lens. The subject became a symbolic fragment which represented universal feelings, but these feelings were linked to the essential qualities of the subject.

The photographs of Adams are an expression of what he feels about the subject. They are images that represent the facts of the situation best in an objective manner.

The Subconscious Mind in Photography

Stieglitz, Weston, and Adams did not deal with the role of the subconscious mind in photography to the extent that White did. They were aware that it entered into the creative work of the artist, but they made no attempt to understand its nature. White studied the relationship of the subconscious mind to the conscious mind in creative photography, and discovered various ways in which the subconscious mind might be used advantageously by the photographer.

The Equivalent

Since the concept of the Equivalent is related to the expression of some inner state of mind, it is natural that both Stieglitz and White should use this concept. Stieglitz found that he could express his feelings about people and places through a photograph which depended not upon outward appearances and literal renditions, but upon mental associations which were set-off in the mind of a spectator who had experienced a similar feeling. He hoped that people would respond to his photographs for the feelings that were expressed within them, and found this to be the case through some rather limited audience response studies.

White refined Stieglitz' idea of the Equivalent. He believes that the photographer can channel or control the spectator's mental image through symbolism and metaphor. Therefore, the Equivalent can be used by the photographer to control the spectator's inner state of mind. White has analyzed how the Equivalent functions in respect to both the photographer and the spectator.

This analysis led to an understanding of how the Equivalent functions in communication. White discovered that the power of the Equivalent lies in the fact that it can convey feelings about things which for one reason or another

cannot be photographed. It can arouse known feelings in other people. This is significant in communication because it enables the photographer or communicator to go beyond literal, factual statements; and to use the medium to arouse certain planned sensations and emotions in the mind of the spectator.

Experiencing a Photograph

White, more than any other photographer, studied the effect of photographs on other people. As a result of these studies, he discovered a great deal about how and why a photograph communicates; or why it fails to communicate.

Stieglitz experimented with audience reactions to his photographs and learned something about the picture as well as the basic attitudes or feelings of the viewer. But, he did not explore this area to the extent that White did, and we know little about what his theoretical findings were.

Weston expressed the belief that it does not matter what the subject matter is, because any subject can portray universal feelings. He used the concept of Equivalence to that extent, but he did not explore the concept as White did, nor could he understand why people responded to his photographs in the manner that they did. Some people saw phallic symbolism in his photography where none was intended.

He received various responses to his work which ranged from the erotic symbolism perceived by Rivera and Orozco to the objective review of his Mexican exhibition by Alfaro Siqueiros. Weston did not explore the reading of photographs or the analysis of audience responses to any significant extent. He concluded that since he received such widely varying responses and opinions towards his photography, the only response that mattered was his own emotional response.

Adams and White differ in their opinion as to the value of exploring a photograph. Adams holds that there is no systematic method of exploring a photograph and that every individual will have his own personal approach in this matter. He takes the view that if the spectator perceives the emotional meaning of the tonal values, he will understand what the photographer is trying to convey. It would appear from this study that Adams' viewpoint stems from a lack of knowledge about this area of the medium.

White believes that there is a systematic method for experiencing a photograph. He has described a working methodology in considerable detail. Furthermore, White points out that there is a great deal more to experiencing a photograph than understanding the emotional meaning of tonal values. His research shows that emotional blocks can affect the

nature of a response or prevent meaningful contact with the image. In addition, the image can mirror some part of ourselves and we may not see what the photographer wishes to convey at all.

White and Adams both feel that too much verbalization might result in a distortion of what the photograph communicates. However, there is a semantic difference in the use of the term. When Adams uses the word "verbalization," he refers to what White means when he uses the term "pertinent response." He is not referring to White's use of the term in the sense of "meaningless cliches that indicate a lack of contact with the image."

Adams has stated that verbalization is an unnecessary expression of what might better be said photographically. White feels that a pertinent response can serve as feedback for the photographer. If the photographer understands how a photograph makes him feel, he may be able to use that photograph to arouse a similar response in others. The photographer must first understand how a photograph makes others feel, in order to control and predict the visual experience in other people.

White's findings, that the photographer can evoke known feeling states in other people by: understanding

his own response to the photograph, comprehending the photograph fully, and using the audience response to help understand the nature of the audience, throws a great deal of suspicion on Adams' statement. The study of audience responses can lead the photographer towards an understanding of how well a particular photograph may communicate to a specific audience. By sampling an audience, that is similar in nature to the intended audience, the photographer may be able to predict what the effect of a photograph will be. The collation of the audience's experiences with the photographer's or communicator's can serve as an indicator as to whether or not the "known idea-feeling" is actually being aroused in an audience.

The communicator must bear in mind that the audience will only be able to perceive the idea-feeling if: (1) the idea-feeling is actually present in the photograph; (2) the audience has experienced a similar life experience as the photographer; and (3) the audience is visually sophisticated to the extent that it can make a pertinent response to the photograph. Adams' feeling that we need not verbalize about our photographs, because our feelings are expressed photographically for all to read, indicates that he does not understand this area of photography as thoroughly as White

does. He neither understands the emotional blocks which can prevent response, nor does he comprehend the value of this area of study to the communicator.

Major Theoretical Contributions

Part of the significance of this study is that it enables us to analyze the major theoretical contributions of each photographer. Stieglitz discovered the concept of Equivalence and did more than any other photographer to obtain recognition for photography as a fine art. Weston developed concepts about the unique characteristics of the medium. These ideas gave impetus to the growth of Straight Photography and revealed the importance of previsualization to the creative photographer. Adams' significance lies in the discovery of the Zone System. This System gives the photographer a tool by which the previsualized image can be scientifically controlled within the limitations of the medium, and therefore enables the photographer to fulfill his creative intentions. White expanded upon many of the existing concepts, but he also developed new theories which add to our further understanding of the medium. His general concepts about light, space, and form, etc., have expanded our understanding about how the various elements function within a photograph to permit the photographer to express a

known feeling. The Sequence is a new Art Form which opens up additional avenues of communication for the photographer. In addition, White's theoretical findings in respect to the role of the conscious and subconscious mind in photography, how a photograph may be experienced, and audience responses, provide the communicator with valuable knowledge as to how photography functions as a visual communications medium.

Major Conclusions To Be Drawn from the Study

This study indicates that photographs can function in one of four ways. A photograph may make superficial statements about subject matter, and reveal only the surface level or physical qualities of the subject. The camera can be turned outward by the photographer to reveal the essence of the subject, or inward to reveal the photographer's feeling-state at the time the photograph was made. Finally, a photograph can function in a manner that reveals something to an audience about itself.

Photography provides the communicator with an effective means of communication, since the medium can produce known feeling states in other people. However, if the photographer or communicator is to transmit known feeling states to an audience, he must understand his own response, the photograph, and the audience.

The visually sophisticated person can experience the photograph to the same extent that the word oriented person experiences the written word. It is not possible, however, to predict exactly what that experience will be. It is only possible to know that some experience is taking place in the spectator. This experience can occur on either the emotional, intellectual, or physical level--or any combination thereof.

The photographer must master the problems of craftsmanship to carry out creative self-expression. The characteristics and limitations of the medium must then be utilized in order to effectively carry out the aesthetic purpose of the photographer.

Too much intellectual analysis hinders the photographic experience. Not only must the photographer utilize the subconscious mind to translate an idea-feeling into a real image, but too much intellectual analysis can block the spectator's emotional response to the photograph. This study has shown that the medium is as fully dependent upon chance, emotional feelings, and intuition, as it is upon science, and intellectual analysis.

The life experiences of the photographer contribute to his creative work by causing an inner growth to take place within him. In addition, these life experiences generate

idea-feelings within the photographer which may lie dormant with him; but which can manifest themselves in the form of an Equivalent. It is through the Equivalent that the photographer is able to render the invisible visible, or communicate a known feeling state to an audience.

The aesthetic theories set forth in this study provide the photographer or communicator with the theoretical knowledge that is necessary to use the medium with some degree of control. But equally important, these concepts can help an audience to experience photographs in a meaningful way. By laying bare the essential knowledge that is required of both the communicator and the audience, this study serves to further our understanding of the visual communication process.

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